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ABSTRACT

This handbook contains accreditation information from the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, including general institutional requirements, criteria for accreditation, and policies on educational change. Chapters include: (1) "Introduction to Voluntary Accreditation and the Commission"; (2) "Affiliation with the Commission" (forms of affiliation, institutional obligations, sanctions, record of status and scope); (3) "General Institutional Requirements" (purpose and relationship with the criteria); (4) "Criteria for Accreditation" (patterns of evidence and definitions of the five criteria); (5) "Institutional Evaluation for Improvement" (self-study process and reports); (6) "Peer Review as a Form of Evaluation and Self Regulation" (the consultant-evaluator corps); (7) "Logistics for Evaluation Visits" (institutional and team preparations, conducting the visit); (8) "The Team Report and Recommendation" (audiences, writing responsibilities, report structure, role of the Record of Status and Scope (RSS) and preparation and submission; (9) "Review Processes and Commission Action"; (10) "The Evaluation Process: Charts, Timelines, and Samples"; (11) "Other Monitoring Visits" (focused evaluations, special cases); (12) "Institutional Change" (defining, evaluating); (13) "The Commission's Candidacy Program"; (14) "Special Focus: The Commission's Federal Compliance Program" (policy and procedures); and (15) "Informing the Public" (commission and institutional disclosure). Appended are: rules of procedure, resources on higher education topics, regional accrediting bodies, state agencies in the North Central region, and information on the Commission including offices and staff, calendar, publication, terminology, and common abbreviations, an index, and an index of Commission policies. (BF)

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Handbook of Accreditation

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North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education

Chicago, Illinois • September 1997

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Preface

The North Central Association's Commission on Institutions of Higher Education publishes and periodically revises its documents that provide essential and current information about the Commission's policies and practices relating to accreditation and institutional improvement. The Commission staff prepared this *Handbook of Accreditation* primarily for the use of institutional representatives and evaluators. However, it will be useful as well for all those interested in the work of the Commission.

This *Handbook* is called the Second Edition because it continues the commitment we made with the last edition to provide a single, comprehensive volume filled with assistance and examples as well as descriptions of policies and procedures. Through the format and print, we continue to make the *Handbook* "user-friendly," with important information clearly identified and readily available. We hope that all who use the *Handbook* will find it helpful, and we welcome suggestions for improvement of future editions.

While portions of this Second Edition come from the last edition and have only been edited lightly, other parts have been significantly recast. We provided the revised sections for Criteria Three and Four at the 1996 and 1997 Annual Meetings. Those revisions incorporate information on assessment and the newly-adopted pattern of evidence for graduate education. At the 1997 meeting we also circulated a draft of the materials that are now in Chapter 14, "The Commission's Federal Compliance Program," including instructions for institutions about unannounced inspections. This edition also includes information about third party comment. We moved the instructions on the Statement of Affiliation Worksheet to a better place in the volume, and we revised and strengthened the instructions to the Team Chair on writing the Team Report. Within the text of Criteria Two and Three, we now include new comments on libraries and learning resources and on accelerated courses and programs.

The last edition of the *Handbook* was written on the eve of the Commission's implementation of several policies and programs responsive to the 1992 Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. This edition is published just as Congress is beginning to draft legislation for the 1997 Reauthorization. While we hope that the new legislation might diminish some of the compliance responsibilities that we have assumed, it is clear that the Commission must continue to find ways to assure that its activities are relevant to a variety of changing public needs.

In August 1997, the Commission called on its members and staff to begin a period of careful experimentation with the accreditation process. It is clear that the significant changes now taking place in higher education call for equally significant re-envisioning of the accreditation process. The recent survey of the membership conducted by the Commission's Committee on Organizational Effectiveness and Future Directions provided strong testimony to the changes that our members are experiencing. The learning that must be achieved by the Commission over the next few years as it seeks ways to assure the relevance and effectiveness of accrediting processes will require new creative and collaborative relationships with member institutions. We enter a challenging and exciting time.

Please call or write the Commission staff if you have questions about the information in the *Handbook* or if we can assist you in any way. I also recommend that you check for updated information on the Commission's Web site: www.ncacihe.org.

Steven D. Crow
Executive Director

September 1, 1997

1

Introduction to Voluntary Accreditation and the Commission

VOLUNTARY ACCREDITATION

Voluntary accreditation of educational institutions, as carried out by the various accrediting bodies, is a uniquely American process. Accreditation is sought voluntarily by institutions and is conferred by non-governmental bodies. Voluntary accreditation has two fundamental purposes: quality assurance and institutional and program improvement. There are two types of voluntary accreditation of educational institutions: institutional accreditation and specialized accreditation.

☐ Institutional Accreditation

Institutional accreditation evaluates an entire institution and accredits it as a whole. An institutional accrediting body evaluates more than the formal educational activities of an institution; it assesses, as well, such characteristics as governance and administration, financial stability, admissions and student personnel services, institutional resources, student academic achievement, institutional effectiveness, and relationships with constituencies outside the institution.

Six agencies provide institutional accreditation on a regional basis–Middle States, New England, North Central, Northwest, Southern, and Western. While independent of one another, the six regional associations cooperate extensively and recognize one another's accreditation.

In addition, six national institutional accrediting associations offer accreditation for institutions with particular religious purposes, private trade and technical schools, private business colleges, and colleges focusing on health-related fields, as well as institutions offering programs primarily through distance delivery and home study. The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools accredits a small number of institutions that also are affiliated with one or more other institutional accrediting associations. The Commission requires that these institutions describe themselves in identical terms to both associations in regard to purpose, governance, programs, degrees, diplomas, certificates, personnel, finances, and constituents. The Commission also requires that institutions inform it of any changes in status made by the other accrediting agency.

☐ Specialized Accreditation

Specific programs within an educational institution can also seek accreditation. This specialized (or program) accreditation evaluates particular units, schools, or programs within an institution and is often associated with national professional associations, such as those for engineering, medicine, or law, or with specific disciplines, such as business, education, psychology, or social work. Institutional accreditation is separate from the accreditation given or withheld by professional associations, although the Commission does take cognizance of the standards set by professional bodies. The Commission also requires affiliated institutions to inform it of significant changes in status with specialized agencies.

THE NORTH CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

On March 29 and 30, 1895, 36 school, college, and university administrators from seven Midwestern states met at Northwestern University in response to an invitation signed by the presidents of the University of Chicago, the University of Michigan, Northwestern University, and the University of Wisconsin, and by the principals of Grand

Rapids High School, Michigan Military Academy, and the Michigan Normal School. They had been called to "organize, if deemed expedient, an association of colleges and schools of the North-Central States." The constitution of the association these educators formed stated that the North Central Association's object would be "the establishment of close relations between the colleges and secondary schools" of the region.

Within a short time, the desire to improve articulation between secondary schools and colleges led to extensive examination of the quality of education at both levels; that, in turn, led to the accreditation of secondary schools and, later, colleges and universities.

Three histories of the Association—Calvin O. Davis' *A History of the North Central Association* (1945), Louis G. Geiger's *Voluntary Accreditation: A History of the North Central Association 1945-1970* (1970), and Mark Newman's *An Agency of Change: One Hundred Years of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools* (1997)—trace this evolution and chronicle the decisions and actions the Association has taken to provide educational leadership to the region and the country.

Today, the Association serves colleges and schools in 19 states (Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming); American Dependents' Schools operated overseas for the children of American military and civilian personnel; and Navajo Nation schools. Its day-to-day operations are conducted by its two Commissions: the **Commission on Schools,** with regional offices in Tempe, Arizona, accredits institutions below the postsecondary degree-granting level; and the **Commission on Institutions of Higher Education,** in Chicago, Illinois, accredits institutions of higher education.

THE COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

☐ The Mission of the Commission

The Commission adopted the following Statement of Mission on August 6, 1992:

History and Purpose

The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education is part of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The Association was founded in 1895 as a membership organization for educational institutions. It is committed to developing and maintaining high standards of excellence. The Association is one of six regional institutional accrediting associations in the United States. Through its Commissions it accredits, and thereby grants membership to, educational institutions in the nineteen-state North Central region. The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education is recognized by the Secretary of Education and the Committee on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation (CORPA).

Statement of Mission

The mission of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education is (1) to establish requirements and criteria for the accreditation of institutions of higher education and accredit institutions found to meet those requirements and criteria; (2) to strengthen educational and institutional quality through its assistance to its affiliated institutions, its evaluation processes and its programs, publications, and research; (3) to advocate and exercise self-regulation in higher education through effective peer review; and (4) to provide to the public accurate information concerning the relationship of affiliated institutions with the Commission.

To fulfill its mission, the Commission:

- ◇ monitors and evaluates institutions affiliated with it, to ensure that they continue to meet the Commission's requirements and criteria and strive to improve their institutional strength and the quality of the education they provide;
- ◇ prepares and disseminates publications, provides counsel, sponsors research, and conducts meetings directed toward the improvement of higher education;
- ◇ evaluates itself to assure that its policies and practices represent the best theory and practice of institutional accreditation, promote the self-regulation of institutions, and respond to the educational needs of society;
- ◇ provides a program of non-membership affiliation open to new or developing institutions of higher education that appear capable of achieving accreditation within a specific period of time;
- ◇ involves educators from member institutions in all of its review and decision-making processes, and trains and evaluates them to ensure that their work is consistent and of high quality;
- ◇ serves the public by providing useful information about the role and purposes of accreditation, and by providing through its publications and other means timely and accurate information concerning affiliated institutions;
- ◇ honors the historical purposes of the North Central Association through its work with the Commission on Schools to strengthen the linkages between primary and secondary education and higher education;
- ◇ cooperates with other agencies that share the objectives of assuring the integrity and enhancing the quality of higher education.

☐ The Evolution of the Criteria

Since it began accrediting higher education institutions in 1913, what is now known as the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools has tried both to reflect and to encourage progress in higher education. At first, institutions were measured against a set of standards. Some were quite explicit ("the college, if a corporate institution, shall possess a productive endowment of not less than $200,000"; "the college should limit the number of students in a recitation or laboratory class to thirty"); others were broader ("the college should be provided with adequate books in the library and laboratory equipment to develop and fully illustrate each course taught"). During the first decades of the century, such quantitative and prescriptive standards helped to bring some order to higher education.

But as early as 1921 President Henry Pratt Judson of the University of Chicago warned against the danger of excessive rigidity in the standards; and by the end of the Twenties, critics charged that the standards had become roadblocks to legitimate experimentation and constructive change. The Association's college commission responded to these concerns by undertaking an exhaustive study of its accreditation process.

This reconsideration ended in a fundamental shift in the emphasis of the accreditation process that led the Commission to the principles that still guide it today. The concept of standardization was abandoned. Henceforth, the Association declared in 1934, an institution would be judged "on the basis of the total pattern it presents … It is accepted as a principle of procedure that superiority in some characteristic may be regarded as compensating, to some extent, for deficiencies in other respects … an institution will be judged in terms of the purposes it seeks to serve." Under this new approach, strengths were to be weighed against weaknesses to evaluate the "total pattern" of the institution. Before, it was assumed that all institutions had the same fundamental purposes; now, the increasing diversity of institutions was to be recognized. Each institution was to be judged in the light of its own self-declared purposes—as long as these were appropriate to a higher education institution. "Standards" were replaced by "criteria," "inspectors" became "examiners," and the basis for accreditation decisions became a comparison of data concerning an institution against a set of "norms" derived from data accumulated from many institutions. The "pattern" of data from the institution being evaluated was compared to a "pattern map" based on these norms, and the institution was accredited if the two patterns seemed to match.

The normative technique was used until after World War II. It became apparent that the notion of standardization—the pressure to conform—was inherent in the very idea of norms. The idea of a norm assumes similarity; institutions could not be measured against a norm unless they were basically alike. But the 1934 principle accepted the fact that they were not alike. Moreover, using normative data to make evaluation decisions also conflicted with the principle that an institution was to be judged on the basis of its stated purposes. Further, in 1957 the Commission began a program of periodically reaffirming the accreditation of member institutions. As a consequence, a new emphasis was placed on institutional renewal and improvement.

In response to these developments, the Commission produced its *Guide for the Evaluation of Institutions of Higher Education* (1958). The *Guide* moved beyond the idea of norms and the pattern map to direct the attention of both institutions and Commission examiners to seven basic questions that were considered indicative of the areas that needed to be assessed in order to determine the quality of an educational institution (e.g., "What is the educational task of the institution?" "Are the necessary resources available for carrying out the task ... ?"; "Is student life on campus relevant to the institution's task?"). The focus of evaluation became more qualitative, less quantitative; and, as a result, the professional judgment of the Commission's examiners became proportionately more important in the evaluation decision. The *Guide* was in use in various editions until the early Seventies, and many of the areas it addressed are still reflected in the current Criteria.

In the Sixties and Seventies, the Commission's membership increased both in size and variety. Community colleges, vocational-technical institutes, and specialized institutions assumed an increasing importance in American education; and the configurations of resources and organization appropriate to them were not always comparable to those traditionally found in four-year colleges and universities. The Commission joined the other regional postsecondary accrediting commissions in responding to these changes by adopting a set of "conditions for eligibility" in the early Seventies; in effect, these conditions limited and described the kinds of postsecondary institutions the regional associations would accredit. Since the mid-seventies, when its *Handbook on Accreditation* first appeared, the Commission has increasingly emphasized the self-study process as both a procedure for gathering data for accreditation decisions *and* a means to institutional improvement.

In 1981, the Commission adopted the Criteria for Accreditation and Criteria for Candidacy for Accreditation, which incorporated and superseded all previous statements. In 1987, the Commission reformulated its General Institutional Requirements, which defined the essential characteristics of all its affiliated institutions. Criteria for Accreditation and General Institutional Requirements continue to serve as the basis for the accreditation process as it is currently conducted by the Commission.

Committed to continual review of the effectiveness of its work, the Commission in 1991-92 initiated a significant reexamination of its policies, procedures, requirements, criteria, and mission through a Committee on Critical Issues. Among the Committee's concerns were issues of consistency and fairness, the universe of institutions served, the promotion of quality higher education, and greater public awareness and understanding of the role and function of accreditation. The recommendations of the Committee were reviewed by the Commission and distributed to the member institutions for comment in Spring 1992. In a series of actions at its August and November 1992 and February 1993 meetings, the Commission adopted a new mission statement, revised Criteria for Accreditation and General Institutional Requirements, a new candidacy program, and major recasting of the policies on approval of institutional change and public disclosure. These developments resulted in the first major restructuring of the *Handbook of Accreditation* in more than ten years.

The General Institutional Requirements, the Criteria for Accreditation, and the Candidacy Program are reviewed periodically to ensure that they are responsive to the changing nature of and expectations for higher education. The Commission revises or changes them only after seeking comments from its membership.

The Commission Staff and Services

The Commission and its staff provide a number of services for institutions.

- **Commission staff liaison.** Each institution affiliated with the Commission is assigned to a member of the Commission's professional staff. This staff member serves as that institution's resource person and liaison with the Commission. This relationship is particularly important when an institution is preparing for evaluation for initial or continued candidacy or accreditation. It should be clearly understood, however, that staff do not make candidacy or accreditation decisions or recommendations. Staff liaisons may work with as many as 200 institutions of all types and in every state of the region.

  Institutional representatives are welcome to visit the Commission's office in Chicago and meet with their staff liaison; Commission staff also visit institutions on request. Institutions preparing for evaluation of any kind should communicate with their staff liaison. Although not all institutional changes require Commission action, it is essential that an institution contact the staff whenever it considers a change that might affect its status with the Commission (see Chapter 12).

  The Commission staff liaison reviews the institution's self-study plan, provides counsel about ways to integrate the self-study process for Commission evaluation with an institution's ongoing evaluation and planning programs, develops a proposed team for the evaluation visit, and reviews the draft of the institution's Self-Study Report.

  Because of the importance of this working relationship, the Commission will reassign an institution to another staff liaison when it appears that a conflict of interest might be present. In determining conflict of interest, the Commission weighs such things as past attendance, previous and/or prospective employment, the status at an institution of close personal friends or family members, or the holding of privileged information not available to others involved in the evaluation process.

- **Commission office services.** A full-time staff in the Commission's Chicago office responds to inquiries and provides assistance to institutions, Evaluation Teams, other agencies, and the public. The Commission maintains a small library of self-studies available for review by affiliated institutions.

  To assist in communication, the Commission maintains a Web page, e-mail addresses for all staff, a WATS line, an 800 toll-free line, and fax capability. In spring 1997, the Commission launched its Web site. The site is designed to be accessible from any major Web browser on any platform, and provides information about the Commission, its staff, and its policies for affiliated institutions and the general public. In the coming months, the site will be expanded to offer a variety of services to the membership, including policy updates, lists of resources, and links to other Web sites. Many of the Commission's forms are available electronically. Separate resource areas are being developed and used for groups such as Consultant-Evaluators, Self-Study Coordinators, and Assessment Coordinators. See Appendix F for Commission office information and the Commission staff roster.

- **The Annual Meeting.** The Annual Meeting of the North Central Association, held in Chicago in early spring, features an extensive program on self-study, evaluation, and institutional improvement. It is an important gathering time for all affiliated institutions, Consultant-Evaluators, and representatives of related higher education agencies to consider current issues. The Meeting is characterized by the sharing of information among institutions. It provides an excellent opportunity to establish networks with others facing similar challenges. In addition, in each of the past several years the Commission has offered a major track on assessment of student academic achievement. The meeting also includes a track for non-affiliated institutions to become familiar with the Commission's expectations and practices. Approximately 2,000 faculty and administrators from a wide variety of higher education institutions attend the Commission's program at the Annual Meeting.

One- and two-year reminder letters about forthcoming evaluations encourage institutions to send representatives to the Annual Meeting. Many sessions provide guidance about various elements of the self-study and accreditation processes, an opportunity to review Commission policies and procedures and to examine sample Self-Study Reports, and a chance to exchange information and ideas with people from other institutions who are or have recently been engaged in self-study.

The Annual Meeting is open to all persons interested in self-study and institutional improvement; it is particularly useful for Self-Study Coordinators, Steering Committee members, executive officers, and trustees of institutions scheduled for evaluations in the next several years. Program information and registration materials are distributed widely to member institutions, Consultant-Evaluators, and others in late fall.

- **Commission publications.** The Commission's primary means of providing information about its work is through its publications. *A Handbook of Accreditation,* the principal publication of the Commission, should be consulted for essential information about Commission policies, procedures, and processes. The *Briefing* newsletter, published three times each year, provides information on current developments. The *NCA Quarterly* is another useful resource, with each of the Association's two Commissions responsible for two issues a year—one issue providing that Commission's formal list of affiliated institutions, the other serving as a journal of articles relevant to that Commission's work. One outcome of the Annual Meeting program is the annual publication, *A Collection of Papers on Self-Study and Institutional Improvement,* which offers a wealth of valuable information from the perspective of affiliated institutions. See Appendix H or the Commission's Web site for a list of Commission publications.

- **Information to the public.** The Commission receives a wide variety of communications from the general public. The office responds directly to such matters as they relate to regional accreditation in general and the accredited status of individual institutions in particular; many inquiries are referred to other appropriate associations and agencies. The Commission's brochure, *Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions: An Overview,* is particularly helpful in explaining the work of the Commission to the general public. Detailed information on the status and scope of all affiliated institutions is available to the public in the annual directory listing published in the Fall issue of the *NCA Quarterly.* Commission actions are reported in the *Briefing* newsletter. All Commission publications are available to the public from the Commission offices for a modest fee. Occasionally, the Commission develops a Public Disclosure Notice to inform the public about a significant development in the relationship of an affiliated institution with the Commission. The Commission's relationship with the public is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 15.

Complaints Against the Commission

To be considered as a formal complaint against the Commission, a complaint must involve issues broader than concern about a specific institutional action or a specific team. The document must state clearly the nature of the complaint, and it must be signed. The Executive Director, on behalf of the Commission, responds to each complaint made against the Commission; reports regularly to the Executive Committee and the Commission on the nature and disposition of complaints; and compiles annually a list, available to the public on request, that summarizes the complaints and their dispositions. Upon advice of counsel, the Commission retains the right to withhold public disclosure of information if potential legal action is involved in the complaint. Commission policy on complaints against affiliated institutions is discussed in Chapter 15.

☐ Relations with Governmental Agencies

To determine eligibility for United States government assistance under certain legislation, the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) consults the lists of postsecondary institutions affiliated with nationally recognized accrediting agencies that the government views as reliable authorities on the quality of educational institutions and programs. Because the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education is among these governmentally-recognized authorities, affiliation with the Commission helps an institution become eligible for various federal funds. The most recent review of the Commission by the USDE was conducted in 1991-92. The Secretary of Education continued recognition of the Commission in 1993. As this *Handbook* goes to press, the Commission is again seeking continued recognition. The process should be completed early in 1998. Updates on the process will be posted on the Commission's Web site.

The Commission also maintains communications and discussions with officers of state coordinating and governing boards to clarify the functions and concerns of the Commission with respect to its affiliated institutions affected by these types of boards. The Commission's relations with governmental agencies is discussed further in Chapters 11, 14, and 15. The Appendices include a list of state agencies in the NCA region.

2 Affiliation with the Commission

FORMS OF AFFILIATION

Institutions of higher education may be affiliated with the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, and through it with the Association, in either of two ways. One is as a **candidate institution;** the other is as an **accredited institution.** Both affiliations are voluntary and are initiated by the institution.

Candidacy is not a prerequisite to accreditation; an institution applying for initial affiliation may apply for either status. The Commission staff liaison will explain the options as the institution begins its self-study. New or developing institutions usually choose to seek candidacy; older, more established institutions sometimes choose to seek accreditation. The choice of which form of affiliation to pursue will be based on the institution's assessment of whether it meets the Criteria for Accreditation or the Candidacy Program.

The accreditation of an institution includes all its components, wherever they are located. A component of a larger institution may be separately accreditable if a significant portion of responsibility and decision-making for its educational activities lies within the component and not in the other parts of the larger system. The Commission staff determines, following consultation with the executive officer of the institutional system, whether the system will be accredited or whether its components will be separately accredited, and how the evaluation will be conducted.

☐ Candidacy Status

Candidacy is a preaccreditation status and, unlike accreditation, does not carry with it membership in the Association. Candidacy indicates that an institution fulfills the expectations of the Commission's Candidacy Program, which include meeting the General Institutional Requirements (GIRs). Candidacy gives an institution the opportunity to establish a formal, publicly-recognized relationship with the Association. It is the recommended approach to seeking accreditation for most non-affiliated institutions.

An institution granted candidacy is expected to be making progress toward accreditation; **candidacy does not automatically assure eventual accreditation.** Chapter 13 provides a full discussion of the Commission's Candidacy Program.

☐ Accreditation Status

Accreditation of an institution establishes that institution's membership in the North Central Association. Accreditation indicates both to other institutions and to the public that an institution meets the Commission's General Institutional Requirements and Criteria for Accreditation. It also indicates the institution's commitment to the purposes and goals of the Association. An institution becomes accredited by the Commission through the evaluation process outlined in this *Handbook.*

☐ Communication with the Institution

The Commission transmits its official communications to the Chief Executive Officer of the institution. The Commission expects the CEO to forward communications about the self-study and evaluation processes to the Self-Study Coordinator. Because the governing board is the body legally responsible for the institution, copies of letters communicating official Commission action on the institution also are sent to the Chair of the institution's board.

☐ Institutional Withdrawal of Application for Affiliation

An institution may withdraw its application for affiliation, without prejudice, at any time before a decision on that affiliation is made by the Commission. The withdrawal must be initiated by the legally designated governing body of the institution. The Commission will retain all fees if the application is withdrawn after the evaluation visit has been made.

☐ Institutional Resignation from Affiliation

Affiliation with the Association and the Commission is voluntary, and an institution may resign its affiliation at any time. Because resignation from affiliation terminates the institution's candidacy or accreditation, it must be initiated by action of the legally designated governing body of the institution. Resignation does not release the institution from past and current financial obligations with the Commission.

☐ Commission Reconsideration of Affiliation

The Commission reserves the right to reconsider the affiliation of an institution at any time; **therefore, it may call for a comprehensive or focused evaluation whenever it believes one is warranted.** In such cases, the Commission will specify both the timing of the evaluation and the materials to be used, without the usual cycle of reminder letters and without the usual requirement (in the case of comprehensive evaluations) that the institution undertake a comprehensive self-study process and prepare a Self-Study Report. The Commission will provide clearly specified reasons for its decision.

☐ Commission Withdrawal of Affiliation

The Commission, after *due and careful* consideration, can withdraw the affiliation of an institution. Commission policies clearly specify the conditions under which such action is taken.

- ◇ An institution may lose its affiliation if it fails to meet one or more of the General Institutional Requirements and/or the Criteria for Accreditation. In such cases, Commission action to withdraw affiliation will result from an evaluation, including an on-site visit, either comprehensive or focused, or upon the recommendation of the Executive Director, if an on-site visit has occurred within the year preceding.
- ◇ An institution may lose its affiliation if it fails to meet Institutional Obligations of Affiliation (see p. 11) within a designated time after being warned in writing of non-compliance.
- ◇ An institution loses its affiliation if it ceases to operate as an educational institution, unless the institution makes special arrangements with the Commission.
- ◇ An institution risks losing its affiliation if it initiates a change after the Commission has denied a request for approval of the change.

☐ Debts to the Commission

Withdrawal of affiliation by the Commission does not cancel any debts owed the Commission by the institution. Neither does withdrawal of an application for affiliation by the institution. In either case, unless exempted by the Commission, an institution seeking a new affiliation status with the Commission must first pay any debts it might previously have incurred with the Commission.

☐ Appeal of a Commission Decision to Deny or Withdraw Affiliation

Institutions have the right to appeal a Commission decision that denies or withdraws accreditation or candidacy. The appeal is made outside the Commission under procedures established by the Board of Directors of the North Central Association, as provided in the Constitution of the Association. In its Rules of Procedure, the Board has specified that the grounds for such an appeal are "(a) that the Commission's decision was arbitrary, capricious, or not supported by substantial evidence in the record on which the Commission took action; or (b) that the procedures used to reach the decision were contrary to the NCA Constitution, Rules of Procedure, *Handbook of Accreditation,* or other established policies and practices, and the procedural error prejudiced the Commission's consideration."

The appeal process requires, among other things, that notice of intent to appeal be an official action of the institution's governing board and be filed with the Secretary of the Association not later than 30 days after the Commission's action. The Association Rules of Procedure on Appeals document is available from the Commission office.

☐ Reapplication Following Withdrawal, Resignation, or Denial

Commission policy specifies the waiting time for institutions that withdraw application, resign their status, or have their status denied or withdrawn by the Commission. Submission of a new Self-Study Report constitutes reapplication.

In most cases the institution will be required to complete the Preliminary Information Form (PIF) process prior to submission of the Self-Study. An institution that has completed the PIF process within the last two years may submit an updated PIF. No additional fee is charged. If the institution has never been through the PIF process or if the PIF process was completed more than two years prior to reapplication, the institution must submit a new PIF and pay the full PIF fee.

- An institution that **withdraws its application for affiliation** any time after the evaluation visit must wait one year after the team visit before reapplying.
- An institution that **resigns its affiliation** must wait one year from the date of resignation before reapplying. An institution wishing to reaffiliate must follow the same procedure as an institution never affiliated with the Commission.
- After consideration of initial application, an institution **denied candidacy** must wait one year after the team visit before reapplying. This period of time may be shortened by Commission action.
- After consideration of initial application, an institution **denied accreditation** must wait two years after the date of the team visit before reapplying.
- When the **Commission withdraws the affiliation** of an institution—either candidacy or accreditation—it will not consider an application for affiliation from the same institution until a period of at least two years has elapsed following the date withdrawal action became effective.

These waiting times may be shortened in individual cases by Commission action.

INSTITUTIONAL OBLIGATIONS OF AFFILIATION

All institutions affiliated with the Commission voluntarily agree to meet Institutional Obligations of Affiliation, including undergoing periodic review and submitting reports as requested by the Commission. Failure to fulfill these obligations could result in loss of affiliation.

The Commission reviews the status of an institution through periodic comprehensive evaluations. The Commission monitors its affiliated institutions between comprehensive evaluations in a variety of ways. Reports and focused evaluations may be required as part of the Commission's accrediting action. In addition, the Commission's Annual Report form provides current information on institutional activities and trends. In some cases, the information gathered by these means can lead to further monitoring.

☐ The Periodic Review Cycle

Candidacy is continued by evaluations scheduled at least every two years during the candidacy period. Every accredited institution must have its status reaffirmed not later than five years after it has been initially granted, and not later than ten years following each subsequent reaffirmation. The time for the next comprehensive evaluation for continued candidacy or accreditation is explicitly stated in the Commission's accreditation action; however, the time of that evaluation may be changed and may occur sooner if the institution introduces or plans changes that substantially alter its mission, functions, or character (see Chapter 12).

☐ Reports

The Commission oversees institutions by requiring written reports that address specific developments. The staff liaison may ask the Team Chair to review the institution's report because it is sometimes difficult for staff to judge the adequacy of the report as a response to the previous Evaluation Team's concerns. The staff member prepares a written analysis of the report, which includes the Team Chair's comments, if sought, and the staff action on the report. The analysis is sent to the institution and, if appropriate, the Team Chair.

Commission staff ultimately has the authority to take certain actions on institutional reports. Staff actions on reports are reported to the Commission. The staff may:

- ◇ receive and accept the report, thereby removing the requirement of the report;
- ◇ change the due date of a report when necessary (e.g., if additional information is needed);
- ◇ require a follow-up report(s) if staff determines that the report does not demonstrate sufficient progress in alleviating the team's concerns.

In some cases, information in a report may lead staff to recommend to the Commission another form of review, such as

- ◇ the scheduling of a focused visit,
- ◇ the addition of a stipulation on the Statement of Affiliation Status, or
- ◇ the rescheduling of the next comprehensive evaluation.

The staff recommendation may be implemented in one of two ways. The institution may request the additional review. If the institution makes such a request, then the review will proceed according to established policies and procedures. If the institution does not request the review, the Commission staff can take a recommendation to the Commission. If such action is sought, a staff analysis that includes the staff's recommendation and the institution's reaction, if any, is provided to the institution, the Commission, and, if appropriate, the Team Chair.

The Commission differentiates among the required reports: progress reports, monitoring reports, and contingency reports. Their differences are outlined in Chapter 8.

☐ Focused Evaluations

Focused evaluations are another form of Commission oversight; they occur between comprehensive evaluations and examine only certain aspects of an institution. Focused evaluations are not primarily concerned with determining whether an institution fulfills the Criteria for Accreditation. Instead they are meant to review specific developments and changes at an institution or to follow up on concerns identified by a previous evaluation process.

The Commission may call for a focused evaluation as part of its accrediting action. Such actions are recorded on the institution's Statement of Affiliation Status. In addition, either the Commission or the Commission staff may schedule a focused evaluation based upon Commission policies concerning institutional change (see Chapter 12). In either case, focused evaluations require a report focused on the issues, but do not require a complete institutional self-study. Focused evaluations, in unique situations, may lead to a recommendation for Probation or withdrawal of affiliation.

☐ Institutional Annual Reports

In the spring of each year, the Commission sends each affiliated institution an Institutional Annual Report form. The Commission considers the Annual Report to be such a significant monitoring tool that failure to supply it may invite sanctions.

The Institutional Annual Report requests information about enrollment, about changes in degree offerings, and about contractual arrangements. It includes the Annual Report of Off-Campus Offerings, which requests detailed information about all off-campus operations. The Annual Report is structured around the Record of Status and Scope (RSS). The Commission staff reviews the reports to ensure that institutional operations continue to comply with Commission policies and are within the affiliation status of the institution. Inconsistencies between activities reported and the current RSS may lead to the initiation of the Commission's change process (see Chapter 12). An institution's most recently completed Annual Report form is included in the materials sent to Evaluation Teams from the Commission office. Information from the Annual Report is essential to the publication of the Commission's directory of affiliated institutions.

☐ Payment of Dues and Fees

Payment of dues and fees is an obligation of affiliation. The Commission bills affiliated institutions for annual dues that are payable on receipt of the billing and are not refundable. The Commission bills the institution for all evaluation processes. Payment is due prior to the evaluation. The Commission reserves the right to withdraw the affiliation of an institution that, after due notice, fails to meet its financial obligations.

SANCTIONS

From time to time, the Commission may apply sanctions against its affiliated institutions. Currently, the Commission has two sanctions: Memorandum for the Record and Probation.

☐ Memorandum for the Record

The Memorandum for the Record is the sanction applied to an institution that initiates a change without receiving prior Commission approval. The policy states:

The Memorandum for the Record is an official Commission sanction which indicates that an institution, because of its initiation of institutional change without required prior Commission approval, has violated its institutional obligations of affiliation.

The Commission determines whether a Memorandum should be added to the institution's official file. It makes that decision (1) upon the recommendation of the Commission staff and/or Evaluation Team or (2) in situations deemed appropriate by the Commission. A Memorandum for the Record may be issued whether the institution ceases the change or seeks approval for it. The Memorandum, as a part of the institution's official file, will be shared with the next Evaluation Team.

This policy does not apply to an institution that initiates change after the Commission has denied a request for approval of the change. In such situations the institution risks losing its affiliation.

☐ Probation

Probation is a public status signifying that conditions exist at an accredited institution that endanger its ability to meet one or more of the Commission's General Institutional Requirements and/or Criteria for Accreditation. An institution on Probation must disclose this status whenever it refers to its North Central Association accreditation.

Only the Commission, acting on a recommendation made to it, can place an institution on Probation. A recommendation that an institution be placed on Probation may be made to the Commission by

- ◇ a comprehensive or focused visit team,
- ◇ a Review Committee, or
- ◇ the Executive Director of the Commission if conditions appear to warrant Commission action without an evaluation visit.

A team recommendation for Probation is automatically referred to a Review Committee. In all cases, the Commission acts on a recommendation for Probation only if the institution's Executive Officer has been given an opportunity to place a written response to the recommendation before the Commission.

In placing an institution on Probation, the Commission identifies in the Statement of Affiliation Status section of the institution's Record of Status and Scope (RSS), (1) the specific conditions that led to Probation and (2) the date of the institution's next comprehensive evaluation, at which time the institution must provide clear evidence of its progress toward ameliorating those conditions. The RSS of an institution on Probation is available on request from the Commission, after the institution has been notified officially of its Probation. The RSS is published in the Commission's annual lists of affiliated institutions.

The Commission's decision to remove an institution's Probation status is based upon recommendations from a comprehensive Evaluation Team and a Review Committee. The Commission follows its established policies in choosing to accept, reject, or modify these recommendations.

THE RECORD OF STATUS AND SCOPE

The Commission includes in its statement of mission the commitment to provide to the public accurate information concerning the relationship of institutions affiliated with the Commission. This relationship is captured in a public disclosure document, a **Record of Status and Scope (RSS),** which reports the status of the institution with the Commission and additional information from the institution's Annual Report. The Commission has prepared an RSS for each institution affiliated with it. The RSS, printed in full each year in the *North Central Association Quarterly*, is provided to anyone who requests it.

The RSS consists of two major components:

◇ the **Statement of Affiliation Status** (SAS), the basic document that summarizes the status of the institution with the Commission, and

◇ the **Statement of Institutional Scope and Activities** (SISA), a summary of information extracted by the Commission from the Institutional Annual Report.

☐ The Statement of Affiliation Status (SAS)

Each Statement of Affiliation Status section of the RSS contains these basic elements: name; highest degree awarded; most recent Commission action; status; stipulations; site approval exemption; progress reports required; monitoring reports required; contingency reports required; other evaluations required; last comprehensive evaluation; next comprehensive evaluation. Each time a change in the information pertaining to one or more of these elements occurs, the SAS is reviewed and revised through appropriate Commission processes; the revised SAS is sent to the institution by the office of the Commission. Thus, at any given time, the most recent SAS contains the current information concerning the institution's status with the Commission.

☐ The Statement of Institutional Scope and Activities (SISA)

Each spring the Commission submits an Institutional Annual Report to all affiliated institutions. That report requires the institution to provide, among other things, information on the following activities:

◇ **Legal Status:** indicates whether the institution is public, private, or proprietary.

◇ **Affiliation:** indicates a direct relationship with an external agency, such as a church, a hospital, or, in the case of a proprietary institution, an owner.

◇ **Undergraduate and graduate enrollment:** indicates the headcount and full-time equivalent enrollments for undergraduate and graduate programs during the fall of the most recent academic year.

Note: A few specialized graduate institutions might report undergraduate students. In these situations, the institution does not offer undergraduate programs; instead, it is providing to its graduate students some undergraduate courses that are prerequisite to its graduate offerings.

◇ **Number of degree programs:** indicates the levels at which the institution offers degree programs and the number of degree programs offered at each level. Expansion or change of degree programs may be restricted by Commission action or policy. The Commission does not list graduate certificates.

Note: some institutions may count their programs differently. A few count only basic degrees (e.g., Bachelor of Arts); most count major programs within those basic degrees (e.g., B.A. degrees in English, Mathematics, Biology); and a very few count sub-specialties (e.g., B.A. in Secondary Education, Social Studies).

◇ **Full service degree sites other than home campus:** identifies sites with full on-site administrative and student support services at which one or more degree programs can be completed entirely at that site.

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- ◇ **Other degree sites:** identifies sites at which one or more degree programs can be completed entirely at that site but which are not staffed on-site to provide full administrative and student support services.

- ◇ **Course sites:** identifies sites at which five or more credit bearing courses are offered. In-state sites are identified only by total number and are listed only if 50% or more of a degree program can be completed at the site and if more than 100 students [unduplicated head count] are served at the site annually.

  Note: site listings do not include internships, clinical sites, and study abroad programs.

- ◇ **Other program features:** indicates whether the institution offers courses or programs through means other than traditional classroom instruction.

From that information, the Commission constructs for each institution a Statement of Institutional Scope and Activities. Because this information is self-reported, the Commission's mechanism for developing the SISA allows for some variation among statements. Teams, of course, confirm the accuracy of the SISA during evaluation visits; but institutions may amend the SISA yearly, as long as the amendment does not violate Commission policy on institutional change (see Chapter 12).

Chapter Reference

A Sample RSS

In its final form, a published Record of Status and Scope might look like this:

JOHN DEWEY COLLEGE
1100 South State Street
Chicago, IL 60605
(312) 942-6060
Jane E. Jones, President

This section describes the institution's official status with the Commission.

Statement of Affiliation Status

Status: Accredited. (1952- .)

Highest degree awarded: Master's.

Most recent action: October 16, 1990.

Stipulations on affiliation status: Out of state offerings are limited to the Master of Business Administration degree program in Dubuque, IA, and Kenosha, WI. International offerings are limited to the Bachelor of Arts degree in Tokyo, Japan.

New degree sites: No prior Commission approval required for offering existing bachelor's degree programs at new sites within the state.

Progress reports required: None.

Monitoring reports required: A report by October 1, 1999, on recruitment and retention of students.

Contingency reports required: None.

Other visits required: A visit in 2000-01 focused on faculty development and development at the graduate level.

Last comprehensive evaluation: 1996-1997.

Next comprehensive evaluation: 2006-07.

This information is updated from the institution's Annual Report

Statement of Institutional Scope and Activities

Legal status: Private, not for profit institution.

F/96 undergraduate enrollment: 5240(h); 3658(f). — (h) *headcount*

F/96 graduate enrollment: 1645(h); 1158(f). — (f) *full-time equivalent*

Number of degree programs: Bachelor's (18) Master's (8).

Full service degree sites other than home campus: Springfield.

Other degree sites:

- In state: Peoria, Joliet.
- In other states: Dubuque, IA; Kenosha, WI.
- Outside the United States: Tokyo, Japan.

Course sites:

- In state (5+ courses/semester): 3 sites.

Other program features: Credit offerings in correctional institutions; through alternative delivery.

3 The General Institutional Requirements

PURPOSE OF THE GENERAL INSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENTS

The Commission's General Institutional Requirements (GIRs) fulfill the following purposes.

- They define the broadest parameters of the universe of institutions of higher education that can choose to hold affiliation with the Commission.
- They establish a threshold of institutional development needed by an institution seeking to affiliate with the Commission.
- They reflect the Commission's basic expectations of all affiliated institutions of higher education, whether they hold candidacy or accreditation status.

☐ The Relationship between the GIRs and the Explication

While most of the GIRs are objective in nature, some use words that require judgment. The Commission provides a fuller explanation of its expectation for each GIR through an accompanying explication to assist institutions and Evaluation Teams in making their judgments. The explication is meant to elucidate the GIR, not substitute for it.

An example:

- GIR #10 calls for "a sufficient number" of full-time faculty. The explication proposes that "it is reasonable to expect that an institution would usually have at least one full-time faculty member for each major that it offers." However, the GIR allows for more than a one-to-one relationship between majors and faculty; that is, it does not require that every major have one identified full-time faculty assigned solely to the major.

The Commission can amend the explication as needed to ensure that it is clear and readily understood and is being used effectively and consistently by institutions and Evaluation Teams.

THE GENERAL INSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENTS

An institution affiliated with the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools meets these General Institutional Requirements.

GIR	Explication
Mission	
1. **It has a mission statement, formally adopted by the governing board and made public, declaring that it is an institution of higher education.**	A mission statement defines the basic character of an institution, including a brief description of its primary educational program(s) and their purposes, the students for which they are intended, the geographical area served by the institution (or the particular constituency it serves), and an account of how the institution fits within the broader higher education community. Because the Commission's affiliation with an institution testifies to the appropriateness of its

GIR	Explication
GIR 1 continued…	activities as well as to their quality, it is necessary that the institution's mission statement be adopted formally by the institution's governing board and be made available to the public at large, particularly to prospective students.
2. It is a degree-granting institution.	Through this requirement, the Commission limits affiliation to degree-granting institutions. While an affiliated institution might offer certificates and diploma programs, the Commission expects an appropriate academic focus on its degree programs.

Authorization

3. It has legal authorization to grant its degrees, and it meets all the legal requirements to operate as an institution of higher education wherever it conducts its activities.	An institution of higher education, no matter in which state(s) it is located, must hold appropriate state (and, in a few cases, federal) authority to exist and to grant its degrees. All of the Commission's activities presume the legality of the institution and its operations. Therefore, before an institution can affiliate with the Commission—and before the Commission can extend an institution's affiliated status to include new sites in new states—it must have assurance that the institution holds all appropriate legal authorizations for its higher education activities.
4. It has legal documents to confirm its status: not-for-profit, for-profit, or public.	It is essential that the Commission, as well as the public at large, understand clearly the corporate nature of an institution. Because that nature is confirmed by legal documents, the Commission requires that those documents exist and are available for review.

Governance

5. It has a governing board that possesses and exercises necessary legal power to establish and review basic policies that govern the institution.	Corporate charters, state legislation, or federal charters typically outline the basic authority held by institutions' governing boards. The Commission looks to those documents and to the subsequent bylaws established by the institution to determine whether the governing board possesses appropriate power. In the minutes of the board the Commission seeks evidence that the board carries out its authority. Governing boards should establish policies to direct the institution. Boards should meet frequently enough and be so structured that they possess sound knowledge upon which to establish and review those policies.
6. Its governing board includes public members and is sufficiently autonomous from the administration and ownership to assure the integrity of the institution.	Although every governing board will be concerned primarily with the integrity and academic quality of the institution for which it is responsible, it also has an obligation to assure that the institution serves the public interest. The Commission expects, therefore, that each governing board will have "public members," people who can make decisions free of any personal or financial interests that might be affected. Moreover, the Commission expects that a governing board, while conscious of the interests of a variety of constituencies, has structures and personnel that make it capable of decision-making free from undue influence of governmental bodies, supporting bodies, and employees.

GIR | **Explication**

7. **It has an executive officer designated by the governing board to provide administrative leadership for the institution.**

The Commission requires that the governing board designate a person who leads the institution and who coordinates the day-by-day running of it. Typically that person is the president. No matter what the title, that person must hold appropriate authority to carry out the broad policies established by the governing board.

8. **Its governing board authorizes the institution's affiliation with the Commission.**

In affiliating with the Commission, an institution enters a relationship that it agrees to honor. The governing board must be knowledgeable about that relationship and must approve, by formal action, the institution's entry into it.

Faculty

9. **It employs a faculty that has earned from accredited institutions the degrees appropriate to the level of instruction offered by the institution.**

This GIR describes the threshold educational requirements for an institution's faculty. In this requirement, faculty includes both full-time and part-time faculty. All of an institution's faculty, both those at its home campus(es) and those at other instructional sites, are included in judging this requirement.

Typically, this means that:

in an institution whose highest degree programs are significantly or predominantly at the:	*most (i.e., at least two-thirds to three-quarters) of the faculty have earned, from accredited institutions:*
– associate's level	– bachelor's or graduate degrees
– bachelor's level	– graduate degrees
– graduate level	– doctoral degrees

However, several other factors may lead a team to conclude that this GIR is met. Particularly when judging institutions in or applying for candidacy, a team might consider whether the institution can document the following conditions.

- ◇ All or nearly all faculty teaching transfer courses (i.e., courses in subject areas where work toward the associate degree carries transfer credit toward higher degrees—the liberal arts, business, technology, and an ever-growing number of other fields) hold graduate degrees. (Increasingly, any technical course is liable to be transferable toward a higher degree.)
- ◇ Faculty who now hold less than baccalaureate degrees possess special training, experience, creative production, or other accomplishments or distinctions that qualify them for their specific assignments, and, over the next three to five years, the institution will replace these faculty or upgrade their academic credentials.
- ◇ Faculty who do not hold the typical degrees expected in an institution offering a particular level of instruction are nearing completion of these degrees, or are, with institutional encouragement and support, actively

GIR	Explication
GIR 9 continued…	pursuing courses of study that will lead to these degrees within three to five years. ◇ The institution has adopted and implemented criteria and processes for hiring and replacing faculty that require possession of the degree typical for an institution offering its level of instruction. ◇ Recent changes (i.e., over the last three years) in the composition of the faculty demonstrate clearly a pattern that the institution is moving to improve its faculty's qualifications.
10. A sufficient number of the faculty are full-time employees of the institution.	This GIR speaks to the need for a core of full-time faculty at every institution. Included are faculty whose primary employment is with the institution, whose responsibilities constitute full-time employment, and whose primary responsibilities are instructional. Administrators "with faculty rank" but with no regularly-assigned teaching duties are not counted for purposes of judging this requirement. The Commission has determined that faculty responsibilities at an institution are best fulfilled when a **core of full-time teaching faculty** has as its primary commitment the educational programs provided by the institution. This means full-time rather than part-time employment at the institution. There is no precise mathematical formula to determine the appropriate number of full-time faculty each institution should have. However, it is reasonable to expect that an institution would usually have at least one full-time faculty member for as many majors as it offers. This expectation captures the common understanding in the higher education community that an institution should limit its program offerings to those that it can adequately staff. A consortial institution staffed by full-time faculty of participating accredited colleges and universities satisfies this requirement.
11. Its faculty has a significant role in developing and evaluating all of the institution's educational programs.	This GIR speaks to the role faculty (as defined in GIRs 9 and 10) must play in the design and evaluation of educational programs. **Faculty not only provide instruction and advise students, but also are involved in institutional governance** and operations through their work on committees and other institutional processes. Typically, faculty develop curricula, approve all curricular offerings of the institution, and establish ways to evaluate the effectiveness and currency of the curricula. They are responsible for the quality of off-campus as well as on-campus offerings. Through clearly defined structures, faculty and administrators exercise oversight for all educational offerings.
Educational Program	
12. It confers degrees.	By policy, the Commission accredits institutions only after they confer their first degrees. For candidate institutions that have yet to graduate a student, it is sufficient to show that the institution has a plan and timetable ensuring that it will confer degrees within the candidacy period.

GIR	Explication
13. It has degree programs in operation, with students enrolled in them.	This requirement speaks directly to the nature of institutions acceptable to the Commission. Not only must an affiliated institution offer degree programs, it must also have students actively enrolled in them. This requirement excludes institutions that have authorization to offer degrees, but have students only in short-term programs that do not lead to degrees.
14. Its degree programs are compatible with the institution's mission and are based on recognized fields of study at the higher education level.	The Commission requires that the programs offered by affiliated institutions are both appropriate to the stated mission of the institution and sufficiently common to institutions of higher education. Therefore, the Commission cannot review institutions that offer only programs unique to that institution.
15. Its degrees are appropriately named, following practices common to institutions of higher education in terms of both length and content of the programs.	The naming of degrees usually follows certain traditions revolving around both length and content of program. Often those designators capture the content or breadth of the general education component, the professional content of the program, or the terminal or transfer nature of the program. The Commission requires that affiliated institutions follow such required or common practices in assigning degree designations for their programs. Although some states define by law the length of certain degree programs, most institutions follow standard practice in higher education of awarding degrees only after students have accrued a specific number of quarter or semester hours, have completed a specific number of quarters or semesters of study, and/or have demonstrated proficiencies typically found among students who have accrued the hours of study or have studied for a specific number of years.
16. Its undergraduate degree programs include a coherent general education requirement consistent with the institution's mission and designed to ensure breadth of knowledge and to promote intellectual inquiry.	**Defining General Education** Throughout its history, the Commission has held to the tenet that higher education involves breadth as well as depth of study. General education refers to that component of a student's study that ensures breadth. In 1983 the Commission approved this Statement on General Education, which still applies: General education is "general" in several clearly identifiable ways: it is not directly related to a student's formal technical, vocational, or professional preparation; it is a part of every student's course of study, regardless of his or her area of emphasis, and it is intended to impart common knowledge, intellectual concepts, and attitudes that every educated person should possess. Recently, the Commission refined its understanding of general education, emphasizing the need for a general education program to be coherent, ensure breadth of knowledge, and promote intellectual inquiry. Therefore, regardless of how an institution of higher education defines its goals for general education,

GIR

GIR 16 continued . . .

Explication

- ◇ it will be able to show that it has thoughtfully considered and clearly articulated the purposes and content of the general education it provides to its students;
- ◇ it will give evidence of its commitment to the importance of general education by including an appropriate component of general education in all of its programs of substantial length, whether they lead to certificates, diplomas, or degrees; and
- ◇ if it offers graduate instruction, it will provide further evidence of this commitment by requiring the student to have completed a general education program for admission to its graduate programs.

Documenting the Centrality of General Education

It is essential that an institution of higher education seeking initial or continued affiliation with the Commission document and make public the centrality of general education to its educational endeavors. An evaluation team considers whether the institution's

- ◇ mission and purposes statements articulate the centrality of general education;
- ◇ statements of educational philosophy demonstrate how general education goals are integrated into core, major, and elective courses within the major;
- ◇ institution-wide general education learning objectives are clearly articulated and publicized;
- ◇ assessment of student academic achievement includes the general education component of the program and is linked with expected learning outcomes;
- ◇ faculty teaching general education courses hold graduate degrees that include substantial study (typically a minimum of 18 semester hours at the graduate level) appropriate to the academic field in which they are teaching;
- ◇ faculty have ownership and control over the general education curriculum through active participation in appropriate governance structures; and
- ◇ faculty systematically and comprehensively review the general education curriculum.

Based on its stated purposes for general education, an institution might emphasize in the description of its program either basic curricular patterns, such as a core curriculum or distribution requirements, or it might focus on cognitive experiences and the demonstration of the skills and competencies students acquire as a result of those experiences. However the program is presented, it should be clear that the institution intends to provide a coherent program that ensures breath of knowledge and promotes intellectual inquiry.

GIR	Explication
17. It has admission policies and practices that are consistent with the institution's mission and appropriate to its educational programs.	An institution's admission requirements seek to identify students capable of succeeding both at the institution and in the educational program(s) to which they are admitted. Almost all institutions will need to supplement these requirements with appropriate educational support programs and advising services. Careful attention to federal and state requirements concerning financial aid eligibility, including ability to benefit, is mandatory. Every institution must be vigilant to assure that its programs are appropriately represented to all students. Note: Commission policy holds that each institution determines its own policies and procedures for accepting transfer credits, including credits from accredited and non-accredited institutions, from foreign institutions, and from institutions that grant credit for experiential learning and for non-traditional adult learner programs.
18. It provides its students access to those learning resources and support services requisite for its degree programs.	The learning resources referred to in this requirement might differ according to the program. For example, vocational-technical programs cannot succeed without shops and laboratories necessary for effective teaching and learning. Every program requires some use of library resources, broadly defined to include access to information through information networks and computer data bases as well as print media. Similarly, institutions must provide student support services that might include such things as academic advising and financial aid counseling for all institutions, housing and food services for residential colleges, and support programs for targeted constituencies at many colleges. If the institution does not own these resources, it must show that its students have access to them on a regular, dependable basis.
Finances	
19. It has an external financial audit by a certified public accountant or a public audit agency at least every two years.	Not only does the Commission consider an external financial audit as necessary for sound management of an institution, it also relies on such audits to provide important information necessary to the accreditation process. This clarifies the Commission's requirement for certified financial statements with a certified public accountant's opinion to validate the statements prepared by the institution. Where separate audited financial statements are not available because the institution is a component of a larger corporate entity, the institution may satisfy this requirement by providing audited financial statements of the larger organization that include as "Supplemental Information" the financial activity of the institution as separate from the organization. This "Supplemental Information" will have been subjected to the same auditing processes as the basic financial statements.
20. Its financial documents demonstrate the appropriate allocation and use of resources to support its educational programs.	A balanced budget does not ensure that the institution adequately supports its educational programs, although both budgets and audits give some evidence of how an institution allocates its resources. Given the complexity of many institutions, other financial documents, such as multi-year comparative statements and long-range plans, might be equally important in explaining the fiscal priorities of the institution.

GIR | **Explication**

21. Its financial practices, records, and reports demonstrate fiscal viability.

The Commission looks at budgeting and accounting practices, cash-flow histories and projections, and debt-equity ratios, among other forms of evidence, in determining whether this requirement is met. Institutions that cannot build reserves or that frequently use reserves to balance budgets might not be well-managed financially. Institutions with significant cash-flow problems run the risk of having to declare bankruptcy. Institutions may carry such a heavy debt load that long-term financial health is impossible. Since the Commission's affiliation with an institution should provide to the public some assurance of the institution's long-term stability, the Commission must weigh carefully the institution's financial health.

Public Information

22. Its catalog or other official documents includes its mission statement along with accurate descriptions of

    ○ its educational programs and degree requirements;

    ○ its learning resources;

    ○ its admissions policies and practices;

    ○ its academic and non-academic policies and procedures directly affecting students;

    ○ its charges and refund policies; and

    ○ the academic credentials of its faculty and administrators.

The Commission requires that an institution's publications provide dependable consumer information. The college catalog and the student handbook serve as the primary documents through which a college publishes this important information, although some might use other documents as well. It is critical that the documents are available to the public, and are clear, accurate, and useful to the reader.

23. It accurately discloses its standing with accrediting bodies with which it is affiliated.

Just as the Commission requires that its affiliated institutions fairly and accurately represent their affiliation with the Commission, so too does the Commission require that affiliated institutions follow the same practices with all other accrediting bodies. Because the public often confuses the nature and purposes of institutional and specialized accreditation, it is important that institutional disclosure of relationships with both are accurate. Under current federal requirements accurate disclosure also includes providing the addresses and telephone numbers of all accrediting associations.

GIR	Explication
24. It makes available upon request information that accurately describes its financial condition.	Most public and private institutions publish annual financial reports, available to prospective students, to alumni, and to the public at large. This requirement aims at providing assistance to those seeking assurance of the fiscal health of an affiliated institution. An institution must communicate to its publics, in catalogs, viewbooks, or other publications, what financial information is available to the public, and how this information can be obtained.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE GIRS AND THE CRITERIA

The General Institutional Requirements (GIRs) describe the primary requirements for affiliation with the Commission. A team evaluating an institution applying for initial candidacy not only examines carefully whether it meets each GIR, but also explores its ability to meet the five Criteria within its period of candidacy. Since each GIR deals with issues evaluated in greater breadth and depth under the Criteria, it is important that both institutions and Consultant-Evaluators understand the relationship between the threshold requirements of the GIRs and the higher expectations embodied in the Criteria.

An institution evaluated for continued candidacy, for initial accreditation, or for continued accreditation continues to document–and Evaluation Teams continue to confirm–that the institution meets the GIRs. Appropriate documentation for establishing that the GIRs and the Criteria are met is listed in Chapter 5, in the section on "Materials Available to the Evaluation Team on Campus." However, it is unusual for examination of the GIRs to constitute a large part of the agenda for comprehensive evaluation visits to accredited institutions unless that institution has undergone significant transformation since its last visit. Customarily, an institution's ability to meet the higher expectations of the Criteria forms the focus of visits to candidate and accredited institutions.

The GIRs establish a foundation within the accreditation process. The Criteria for Accreditation constitute the frame and structure built on that foundation. Each criterion is related to one or more GIRs, but each goes beyond the basic expectation of the GIRs.

The following table suggests the rich variety of relationships between the GIRs and the Criteria.

Criteria for Accreditation	General Institutional Requirement
Criterion One	GIRs #1, 2, 3, 4, 12, 14
Criterion Two	GIRs #5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21
Criterion Three	GIRs #9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 20
Criterion Four	Almost all GIRs relate to this Criterion
Criterion Five	GIRs #3, 6, 8, 17, 22, 23, 24

◇ GIR #1 calls for a mission statement. Criterion One asks for "clear and publicly stated purposes consistent with [the] mission."

- ◇ GIR #16 calls for a "coherent general education program—designed to ensure breadth of knowledge and to promote intellectual inquiry." An institution's discussion of Criterion Three should include evaluation of the effectiveness of that program, not just its design.
- ◇ GIR #18 calls for "access to those learning resources and support services requisite for its degree programs." An institution's discussion of Criterion Two should include evaluation of the adequacy of the learning resources and support services, not just the access to them.

It is possible for an institution to meet the GIRs and fail to achieve affiliation with the Commission. The programs for candidacy and for accreditation require that an institution both meet the GIRs and fulfill the Criteria for Accreditation (the Candidacy Program explains the extent to which candidate institutions must fulfill the Criteria). Gaining affiliation with the Commission, then, requires more than meeting the Commission's GIRs.

4 The Criteria for Accreditation

THE CRITERIA AND THE PATTERNS OF EVIDENCE

☐ The Criteria: An Introduction

The purposes of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education include both public determinations of institutional quality and encouragement of continual institutional self-improvement. To inform the evaluation process, the Commission has organized the issues examined in each institutional evaluation into broad areas, or **Criteria for Accreditation** (see p. 65 ff. for a concise list of Criteria). Since all five of the Commission's Criteria are critical to overall institutional effectiveness, meeting all five is required for accreditation.

The Commission sets high expectations for its member institutions in each area, and judges holistically whether member institutions meet its Criteria. Outstanding performance in an area covered by one Criterion does not compensate for unacceptable performance in another. Consequently, in analyzing an institution to identify its strengths and weaknesses, it is critical that both institutions and evaluators understand what is judged under which Criterion. Through its publications and programs, the Commission focuses the attention of both institutions and Evaluation Teams on those issues and areas of institutional operation that are of general concern throughout the higher education community.

☐ Working with the Patterns of Evidence

The Commission has always examined the overall pattern of evidence relating to each Criterion to determine whether an institution should be accredited. The **Patterns of Evidence** provide formally-approved lists of typical areas of institutional activity or concern **("Indicators")** that relate directly to the satisfaction of each Criterion. These lists of indicators illustrate characteristic varieties of evidence that an institution might present in building its case. They provide a core of important concerns to be considered by every institution and Evaluation Team, and inform an evaluative process that is equitable and fair.

Because the indicators exemplify the types of issues that Evaluation Teams will explore, institutions should consider the indicators during the self-study process. **However,**

- not every indicator will be critical for every institution;
- many institutions will want to include additional indicators of their success in fulfilling each of the Criteria;
- the indicators are neither checklists, nor are they exhaustive; and
- the indicators are broad descriptions of the kind of concerns and issues the Commission considers when making a decision about each Criterion.

The Commission confirms its intention by placing after each Criterion and before the list of indicators the phrase–

> "In determining appropriate patterns of evidence for the criterion, the Commission considers evidence **such as**...,"

☐ What Patterns and Indicators Mean for Institutions

The indicators provide a beginning for self-study and self-evaluation, not a complete formula or recipe for conducting a self-study process. To study itself effectively, an institution must first delineate the range of matters it will address. The indicators help identify issues and concerns common throughout American higher education. In addition to these, an institution may consider issues emerging from its own history and experience; its articulated purposes; and the challenges it has faced, now faces, or will face in the future.

The report an institution prepares after completing its self-study process serves as the first mechanism by which the Evaluation Team comes to know, understand, and evaluate the institution. Because the Self-Study Report should demonstrate a *pattern* of evidence concerning each Criterion, it need not present *all* the evidence the institution has collected. Instead, it should summarize broadly the sources and variety of evidence examined, the means and criteria used to evaluate it, and the conclusions drawn from it. In addition, during the campus visit the institution should be able to make additional evidence that supports its conclusions available to the team.

In establishing a pattern of evidence that supports its conclusion that it satisfies each Criterion, an institution should discuss specific indicators that make the strongest case. Similarly, it should address areas of weakness, both to be honest and to ensure credibility. Practiced evaluators know perfect institutions do not exist and can spot undiscussed problems quickly. The institution should understand that the Commission looks collectively at institutional strengths and weaknesses relating to a particular Criterion, balancing them in reaching a judgment. The institution and the Evaluation Team share a responsibility to confront and discuss both strengths and weaknesses.

An institution should avoid using the list of indicators following each Criterion as a table of contents for its Self-Study Report; a presentation organized around these indicators would be fractured, difficult to follow, and would require extensive cross-referencing. Instead, the discussion addressing each Criterion should aim at describing the institution's conclusions reached in its self-study process and the pattern of evidence that supports that conclusion. Undoubtedly individual indicators must be cited or referenced to support this pattern, but the order and emphasis will differ for every institution. However, the lists of indicators might suggest index headings that would confirm the breadth of coverage in the report.

Patterns and Indicators: An Illustration

Criterion One	**The institution has clear and publicly stated purposes consistent with its mission and appropriate to an institution of higher education.**
Statement on "Patterns of Evidence"	In determining appropriate patterns of evidence for the criterion, the Commission considers evidence such as:
"List of indicators" related to Criterion One	a. long- and short-range institutional and educational goals. b. processes, involving its constituencies, through which the institution evaluates its purposes. c. decision-making processes that are appropriate to its stated mission and purposes. d. understanding of the stated purposes by institutional constituencies. e. efforts to keep the public informed of its institutional and educational goals through documents such as the catalog and program brochures. f. support for freedom of inquiry for faculty and students. g. institutional commitment to excellence both in the teaching provided by faculty and the learning expected of students.

What Patterns and Indicators Mean for Evaluation Teams

To make effective use of the Patterns of Evidence, Evaluation Team members read the Self-Study Report with at least three goals in mind.

- First, they see whether the report provides preliminary assurance (to be confirmed when they visit the campus) that the self-study process was, indeed, serious, comprehensive, and designed and executed in a way that could help the institution to discover its strengths, its challenges, and its opportunities for continuing self-improvement.
- Second, the Evaluation Team determines from the Self-Study Report whether a convincing pattern of evidence is present to support the institution's contention that it satisfies each of the five Criteria for Accreditation. From the report, the team will identify indicators that may need further examination during their campus visit.
- Third, and most important, the Evaluation Team determines whether the conclusions the institution drew from its examination of the evidence are valid—and whether the team concurs with the institution's appraisal.

It is inappropriate for an institution to defend its weaknesses by pointing to member institutions with equal (or worse) deficiencies, and an Evaluation Team should not ignore a problem because other institutions with similar or more serious problems are accredited. As the Commission raises its expectations for the higher education community, the decisions it makes will reflect those higher expectations—even if, as a result, there are institutions currently accredited by the Commission that would experience difficulty if they were seeking initial affiliation today.

In making a negative recommendation, a team must identify its concerns, clearly and specifically, showing how the patterns of evidence fail to demonstrate that the institution fulfills one or more Criteria. In doing so, individual evaluators will question the institution's presentation of its case in the Self-Study Report. They will be guided in part by the indicators. But, they will also go beyond the Self-Study Report, asking about aspects of institutional culture and operation that the institution may not have discussed explicitly.

Broader Institutional Contexts

In the Commission's work, institutions and evaluators examine patterns and indicators using multiple contexts or frameworks.

- **What the institution itself articulates as its mission, purposes, and objectives.** Institutions publicly dedicate themselves to particular purposes—from "sharpening minds" to "preparing students for jobs" to "improving society." Not only will the Commission scrutinize an institution's goals in light of their appropriateness to the values of higher education, it will also examine institutional activities and achievements in light of those intentions.
- **How well the institution has progressed since its last evaluation.** The Commission takes seriously its belief that continuous improvement should be an outcome of the accreditation process. Therefore, institutions are measured against their own history; concerns identified during previous evaluations should be corrected and strengths preserved.
- **What generally is recognized as good practice at benchmark or "peer" institutions.** Often a particular aspect of an institution can be evaluated best by comparing it with the corresponding feature of similar institutions. For example, in judging the appropriateness of faculty development, or library resources, or student services, an institution or an Evaluation Team may look at good practice among

whatever group of peer institutions is appropriate. If regional differences are significant, comparison may be with rural institutions, urban institutions, or multi-campus colleges. Comparison should consider a peer group of institutions that faces conditions similar to those at the institution under review.

- **What is deemed appropriate among all of the higher education institutions the Commission accredits.** On many matters, the peer group for comparison may be the entire group of nearly 1,000 U.S. colleges and universities accredited by the Commission. Regarding issues such as the involvement of faculty in the establishment and review of programs, support for free and open inquiry, or the critical centrality of the general education program in undergraduate education, shared expectations and values exist throughout the higher education community. However, the Commission will scrutinize an institution's goals in light of their appropriateness, and consider whether they are in harmony with the values espoused in the higher education community.

FOCUS ON CRITERION ONE

"The institution has clear and publicly stated purposes consistent with its mission and appropriate to an institution of higher education."

☐ Commission Definition of "Purposes" and "Consistent"

"Purposes" refers to the multiple and specific ends the institution intends to achieve in order to carry out its more general "mission." Most institutions have broad, general statements of mission that are relatively brief. Statements of purposes—of long- and short-range institutional goals—are more specific and detailed. Usually qualitative or quantitative measures can speak to their accomplishment.

"Consistent" means that the stated purposes are directly related to the stated mission. For example, part of an institution's mission might be "to meet the educational needs of the community"; a related purpose might be "to assure that working adults have access to effective vocational and technical programs."

When the Commission uses "publicly-stated purposes," it means purposes that are written, published, and generally available to all constituencies. It also means those specific ends for which an institution is willing to be held accountable. Although the Commission historically has used the term "stated purposes" to describe this level of specificity, some institutions choose to use "goals" or "objectives" instead. Some long-range and strategic planning endeavors also use these terms instead of "stated purposes."

☐ Commission Meaning of "Appropriate to an Institution of Higher Education"

The Commission expects its affiliated institutions to have purposes that

- ◇ affirm for faculty and students the freedom of inquiry basic to the intellectual vitality of institutions of higher education;
- ◇ explain the particular combination of academic programs provided by the institution;
- ◇ speak clearly to the learning expected of students;
- ◇ support the commitment to educational breadth and depth typical of institutions of higher education; and
- ◇ commit the institution to the excellence in teaching expected of institutions of higher education.

By specifying "higher education" in this criterion, the Commission defines its expectation that affiliated institutions, through their publicly-stated purposes, share educational goals and values common to other institutions of higher education.

☐ The Role of "Stated Purposes" in the Accreditation Process

The Commission's accreditation processes measure an institution against its more specifically-stated "purposes," not against its broadly-stated mission. The second, third, and fourth Criteria for Accreditation are built on the foundation established in this first criterion: the word "purposes," not the word "mission," is found in each of them.

The Commission assumes that statements of mission and purposes guide institutional planning and budgeting and provide a framework for governance, administration, and communication. They are reflected in every aspect of the institution and its activities, such as admissions and retention policies; curricular and extracurricular programs; hiring, retention, tenure, and promotion of faculty; institutional organizational structure; and financial and physical resources.

Although stated purposes should be flexible enough to allow an institution to respond to new challenges and opportunities, they should be firm enough to allow it to resist haphazard growth or retrenchment. Moreover, they should be clearly stated and precise enough to allow the institution, its constituencies, and the Commission, to measure, either qualitatively or quantitatively, how well the institution achieves them.

☐ Institutional Self-Study and Team Evaluation for This Criterion

Every institutional self-study process should involve an evaluation of the institution's statement of mission and purposes. Sometimes the self-study process becomes an avenue through which the statement is amended, even recast. Considering the central nature of stated purposes to the total accrediting process, institutional self-studies should not treat them lightly. They should go beyond simply quoting the statements from the catalog or from the legislation that established the institution.

Determining whether an institution's purposes are "clear and publicly stated" involves more than judging the intelligibility of their wording or determining where and how they are published and disseminated. It also involves determining whether

- the statement of purposes flows from the statement of mission,
- the statement of purposes supports the values of higher education,
- there seems to be among the institution's various constituents a common understanding of the purposes of the institution, and/or
- the statement of purposes informs decision-making at the institution.

Every Self-Study Report must include the institution's stated mission and purposes. But the self-study process, through which the institution conducts an evaluation of those statements, might take a variety of forms.

Some examples:

- An institution recently has completed a major study and revision of its statements of mission and purposes. The Self-Study Report should discuss the reasons for and merits of that recent revision.

- An institution has not revised its statements in several years. The self-study process might focus on an institution-wide review of the existing statements allowing for new or revised statements to emerge (if necessary to ensure consensus).

☐ Pattern of Evidence Supporting This Criterion

Because of the Commission's basic assumption about the important role of stated purposes in the life of an institution, the institutional self-study process and its subsequent report should take particular care in formulating a response to Criterion One. **In developing the pattern of evidence supporting Criterion One, the Commission suggests the breadth of evaluation that it considers appropriate to this foundational criterion.**

a. long- and short-range institutional and educational goals.

b. processes, involving its constituencies, through which the institution evaluates its purposes.

c. decision-making processes that are appropriate to its stated mission and purposes.

d. understanding of the stated purposes by institutional constituencies.

e. efforts to keep the public informed of its institutional and educational goals through documents such as the catalog and program brochures.

f. support for freedom of inquiry for faculty and students.

g. institutional commitment to excellence in both the teaching provided by faculty and the learning expected of students.

☐ Other Types of Evidence Appropriate for This Criterion

Institutions of higher education often are in different states of maturity and development. Some undergo historic changes in response to changing demographic or economic forces. Some move from an emphasis on training to an emphasis on education. Some move from traditional forms of educational delivery to use of various types of distance delivery within the service area, the state, the nation, and, for a few, the world. Because of these differences, there may be other types of evidence beyond those enumerated previously to support the institution's claim that it meets Criterion One.

Some examples:

- A developing institution has unevenly prepared faculty. Institutional support for the professional development of its faculty might be evidence that the institution is committed to the values of higher education, namely its recognition that the faculty's ability to provide quality higher education is related to the faculty's level of higher education.

- A public or religious institution is trying to assure that its various constituencies agree upon and understand the institution's mission and purposes. Involvement by those constituencies in the processes of legislative or deliberative bodies charged with defining institutional mission and purposes might be important evidence to confirm this commitment.

- An institution has limited resources. Institutional participation in consortia or cooperative higher education ventures intended to provide access to greater learning resources and course offerings might be important evidence of the institution's commitment to excellence in teaching and learning.
- An institution is responding to external and internal changes in the circumstances affecting that institution. Institutional revision of its publicly-stated purposes as a result of the self-study process might be important evidence that it has acted responsibly toward its constituencies by acknowledging those changes and rethinking its original goals.

☐ Weighing Types of Evidence in Determining Whether This Criterion Is Met

Among institutions of higher education affiliated with the Commission, some have specific purposes, the accomplishment of which is absolutely critical to carrying out their mission. Moreover, it is possible that not all stated purposes are of equal significance to the health and vitality of an institution. Within the accrediting process, institutions and Evaluation Teams must weigh carefully and openly the spoken or unspoken priority among stated purposes, as they relate to the institution's mission.

Some examples:

- A single-purpose institution offering professional programs, the graduates of which must be licensed by the state or federal government, might have as a stated purpose "assuring that graduates will be prepared for appropriate licensure." The institution's ability to fulfill that specific purpose is central to its continuance.
- An institution established to educate the religious leadership of its sponsoring denomination might have stated purposes capturing that responsibility. The institution's ability to maintain its denominational commitments will be critical to its success.
- An institution committed to developing quality alternative forms of educational delivery might have that commitment as one stated purpose. The institution's ability to document the quality of its alternate forms of program delivery will be key to its long-term credibility.
- A public institution charged with meeting state-wide needs might state those purposes explicitly. The institution's willingness and capacity to fulfill that responsibility should receive special attention.

FOCUS ON CRITERION TWO

"The institution has effectively organized the human, financial, and physical resources necessary to accomplish its purposes."

☐ Commission Meaning of "Effectively Organized"

In using the words "effectively organized," the Commission refers in part to the governance and administrative structures and processes at an institution. However, in light of the diversity of institutions of higher education, "effectively organized" does not refer to specific structures or to specific processes that must be found in all institutions.

Some examples:

- Committee structures typical of undergraduate and four-year liberal arts colleges might overwhelm a small single-purpose institution.

- Unionized institutions might develop structures that vary significantly from those found in non-unionized institutions.

The Commission also refers to the ways in which an institution, through its governing and decision-making structures, actually organizes certain resources.

Some examples:

- Demonstrating that financial resources are "effectively organized" will require both a review of budgets and audits and a study of the total decision-making processes related to how an institution derives and spends its money.
- Demonstrating that physical resources are "effectively organized" will require more than a description of each building. It also will include a study of how an institution evaluates the conditions and usefulness of its physical resources for its academic programs, including short-term resources, such as computer facilities, and long-term resources, such as buildings and laboratories.

Therefore, "effectively organized," within the accrediting process, includes the requirements established in the General Institutional Requirements and is shaped by common understandings within the higher education community of structures and processes that contribute to effective governance, administration, and communication.

While it is appropriate that institutions establish their own operative definitions of effective organization, the Commission may or may not find those definitions appropriate to an institution of higher education.

Some examples:

- Because the Commission has determined in its General Institutional Requirements that each affiliated institution will have a governing board capable of protecting the integrity of the institution, it will be difficult for an institution that has a board with no authority to claim that it is "effectively organized."
- Because the higher education community places a high value on shared governance, it will be difficult for an institution with no structures for appropriate faculty role in institutional decision-making to claim that it is "effectively organized."

☐ Commission Meaning of "Necessary"

In assessing whether the institution has obtained and organized "necessary" resources, the Commission is not guided by mathematical formulas. If an institution cannot accomplish its stated purposes without certain resources, then those resources are clearly "necessary."

Some examples:

- The faculty and physical plant necessary for a private institution offering seven degree programs to 400 students will be different from those resources necessary for a comprehensive state institution that offers scores of degrees to thousands of students.
- The institution with a small campus and a small full-time enrollment but with many part-time students scattered over a sizable geographic area will need a significantly different configuration of resources than a residential college that offers no off-campus instruction.

While it is appropriate that institutions establish their own operative definitions of the resources necessary for their purposes, the Commission may or may not find those definitions to be appropriate to an institution of higher education.

Some examples:

- The Commission has determined in its General Institutional Requirements that each affiliated institution must have some full-time faculty. Therefore, an institution cannot expect the Commission to accept an operating definition of "necessary" that assumes that part-time faculty alone will fulfill this criterion.
- It is commonly understood in the higher education community that sound baccalaureate education requires student use of libraries and laboratories. Therefore, an institution cannot expect the Commission to accept an operating definition of "necessary" that assumes that baccalaureate education can be accomplished with no use of libraries and laboratories.

☐ The Role of Resources and Their Organization in the Accreditation Process

The type, nature, and organization of resources will vary among accreditable institutions of higher education. However, the fact remains that for an institution to achieve its purposes, there should be adequate human, financial, and physical resources and an effective decision-making and administrative apparatus for organizing and deploying all three. Providing evidence that the institution meets this criterion is critical to the accrediting process.

Some examples:

- Credentials and experience figure prominently in determining the appropriateness of administrators, faculty, and support staff. While reputation is valuable, commitment and resolve play major roles in determining the appropriateness of trustees or regents. While the number of students enrolled is significant, preparation and commitment speak to the fit between the student body and the institution.
- While a direct relationship may not exist between square footage of classroom space and the effectiveness of teaching and learning in that space, a physical plant that cannot accommodate an institution's students or cannot house specially-equipped space necessary for the institution's programs can diminish the educational effectiveness of the institution.
- A financially solvent institution might have a weak financial core—a poorly-funded endowment, a large institution-supported amount of financial aid, a reliance on soft money programs or short-term grants, an electorate that refuses to pass millage, or a state legislature diminishing expected state support—which puts its future resource base at risk.

☐ A Special Note on Libraries and Other Learning Resources

Just as writing and critical reading are essential and fundamental academic skills, access to learning resources that contain the world's accumulated and still-developing knowledge is a necessity for students pursuing a higher education. As they have been for centuries, libraries are still the major means by which most students have access to the books, serials, and other materials their studies require. The Commission expects each institution that it accredits to be responsible for assuring that students can and do use the materials essential for their education.

Good practice holds that a basic collection of reserve and course-related readings and reference texts are conveniently available to all of an institution's students (whether on-campus or at other instructional sites). Trained professional librarians (or the equivalent) are essential—to help the institution acquire, store, and retrieve appropriate resources; to assist students in using these resources; and to help students locate and obtain needed resources that the institution does not itself possess.

Institutions should ensure that their off-campus students have access to adequate learning resources. Access of this sort can be provided through the establishment of a branch campus library; by arranging for the site to have regular access to a local librarian, on-line catalog, and book and document delivery services; by making formal arrangements with other appropriate libraries near the site for student use; or by a variety of other means, some only now developing, including placing resources on an institution's Web site or helping students identify some of the selected and dependable Internet sites where appropriate materials are available. Institutions should make **formal** arrangements with other learning resource centers they wish their students to use.

In addition, institutions should continually enhance their collections of books, bound serials, and other print materials with these newer and often more-convenient forms of information storage and retrieval: microforms, CD-ROMs, audiotape, videotape, CDs, on-line databases, connections to the Internet, and others. Making these resources an integral part of a student's education requires the institution to invest seriously in associated hardware and to provide the staff that can maintain these resources, train students in their use, and provide assistance when it is needed.

☐ Institutional Self-Study and Team Evaluation for This Criterion

To demonstrate that it has met Criterion Two, an institution must have adequate basic data. Unless an institution has an accurate accounting of its resources, it cannot begin to evaluate whether they are adequate to its needs. So, for this criterion, an institutional self-study process will usually begin with an initial effort to gather dependable data. For some institutions, much data might be available in reports prepared by the institutional research officer; but in many institutions, the appropriate data must be gathered from a variety of offices—admissions, student affairs, personnel/human resources, financial aid, comptroller's office, and offices of academic deans or department chairs. The process of identifying and collecting that information—and of supplementing it when it is missing or insufficient—will be part of the effort to collect the evidence needed for Criterion Two.

Determining whether an institution has the "necessary" resources and whether they are "effectively organized" to accomplish the institution's purposes, involves more than counting resources and finding the charters, bylaws, and manuals that outline governing structures; it also involves determining whether

- the decision-making, administrative, and communications structures and processes are well-understood and appropriately used by the institution's constituencies;
- each of the various human resources is appropriate to the institution's purposes;
- the economic strength of the institution is sufficient to support adequately all of the institution's programs and activities;
- the institution's means of obtaining income and its distribution of human, financial, and physical resources reflect values consistent with those widely held by institutions of higher education.

Often, these four critically important determinations prove difficult to establish, especially if the self-study process involves participation by representatives of all the institution's constituencies. For example, not all faculty are literate in institutional finance, nor are people responsible for student services always knowledgeable about appropriate instructional labs. However, one goal of the self-study process should be to engage a variety of constituents in understanding and evaluating all of the institution's resources. It is important, therefore, that time and instruction be provided so that all who participate in the self-study can be effective.

Finances can be especially challenging, for while the bottom line of the institution's financial sheet might suggest economic well-being, it is possible that the institution is underfunding some programs in order to support others or that it is not investing in long-range needs, such as maintenance of the physical plant or updating of the library collection.

☐ Pattern of Evidence Supporting This Criterion

The institutional self-study process and its subsequent report should review a broad variety of matters. **In developing the pattern of evidence supporting Criterion Two, the Commission suggests the breadth of evaluation that it considers appropriate to it.**

a. governance by a board consisting of informed people who understand their responsibilities, function in accordance with stated board policies, and have the resolve necessary to preserve the institution's integrity.

b. effective administration through well-defined and understood organizational structures, policies, and procedures.

c. qualified and experienced administrative personnel who oversee institutional activities and exercise appropriate responsibility for them.

d. systems of governance that provide dependable information to the institution's constituencies and, as appropriate, involve them in the decision-making processes.

e. faculty with educational credentials that testify to appropriate preparation for the courses they teach.

f. a sufficient number of students enrolled to meet the institution's stated educational purposes.

g. provision of services that afford all admitted students the opportunity to succeed.

h. a physical plant that supports effective teaching and learning.

i. conscientious efforts to provide students with a safe and healthy environment.

j. academic resources and equipment (e.g., libraries, electronic services and products, learning resource centers, laboratories and studios, computers) adequate to support the institution's purposes.

k. a pattern of financial expenditures that shows the commitment to provide both the environment and the human resources necessary for effective teaching and learning.

l. management of financial resources to maximize the institution's capability to meet its purposes.

☐ Other Types of Evidence Appropriate for This Criterion

Institutions of higher education accredited by the Commission have some common purposes. However, most institutions differ from one another enough that they must use other types of evidence to demonstrate that they meet this criterion.

Some examples:

◊ An institution has experienced rifts among the trustees, the President, and faculty. Institutional efforts to develop new avenues for intra-institutional communication might be important evidence that the institution is committed to fostering more effective organizational communication structures.

- An institution is facing cuts in state allocations. Institutional initiatives utilizing new technologies to provide learning and support services might be important evidence of the institution's efforts to find new operational definitions of "necessary" and "effective" in a period of fiscal constraint.

- An institution recently has emphasized building new facilities. Institutional reallocation of resources to development, to student enrollment management, or to automation of the library might be important evidence that the institution is committed to strengthening neglected areas.

- An institution has revised its decision-making and administrative structures and processes as a result of the self-study process. Evidence that the institution has become more aware of the importance of participatory governance or more effective administration, or has recognized ways it could make its present organization and processes more effective might be important.

☐ Weighing Types of Evidence in Determining Whether This Criterion Is Met

The stated purposes of the institution and the present opportunities and challenges facing it will determine not only the types of evidence provided but also the relative importance assigned to each by the institution itself and by the Evaluation Team.

Some examples:

- A public institution has recently lost a significant portion of its state support. It might need to develop new sources of funding by mounting a capital campaign or marketing its educational services at additional sites. The institution's ability to find new financial resources in these circumstances will be central to its continuance.

- A community college, without involving its faculty, decided to initiate new off-campus programs to increase student numbers and tuition income. The institution's ability to regain faculty ownership of the extension educational programs would be an important test of its organizational effectiveness.

- A church-related institution closely affiliated with a denomination might be negatively affected by tensions within the supporting denominational body. The independence of the institution's board from the denomination's influence is essential to the board's ability to protect the institution's autonomy, fiscal stability, and educational integrity.

- An institution offers programs that are technology dependent. Its present financial resources may be inadequate for modifying its physical plant and obtaining the equipment required by rapid changes in technology. The institution's ability to reassign a greater share of present resources to these programs, to obtain additional funding, or to find alternate and dependable access to that technology will be critical to its ability to support the programs effectively.

FOCUS ON CRITERION THREE

"The institution is accomplishing its educational and other purposes."

☐ Commission Meaning of "Educational Purposes"

Criterion Three reflects the Commission's primary emphasis upon the educational purposes of its affiliated institutions. The diverse group of institutions affiliated with the Commission has a myriad of stated purposes, but each has specific educational purposes. Those should translate both into coherent and appropriate educational offerings and into programs of assessment to determine the effectiveness of those offerings.

In interpreting the General Institutional Requirements and Criteria for Accreditation, it is important to recall the Commission's mission statement, which limits the Commission's universe to institutions of higher education. This limitation indicates that within the broader universe of postsecondary educational enterprises, the Commission accepts as affiliated institutions only those that share the values of higher education and endeavor to capture those values in the educational programs they offer. Higher education does more than train or certify skills, the goals of many excellent postsecondary institutions. Higher education requires students not only to master a rigorous body of knowledge, but also to conceptualize, analyze, and integrate. Additionally, higher education

- requires students to use their intellect,
- stimulates students to examine their values,
- teaches students the importance of considering divergent views as expressed in research, and
- challenges students to engage each other and their teachers in a free exchange of ideas and attitudes.

The Commission anticipates not only that an institution's stated educational purposes reflect a shared commitment to these values, but also that its educational programs provide strong evidence that the commitment is acted upon.

Commission Meaning of "Other Purposes"

The Commission recognizes that almost all institutions of higher education have a variety of purposes to fulfill other than those directly related to teaching and learning. Those "other purposes" might relate directly to public expectations of the institution or to specific commitments to the sponsoring or funding entity. Some of those purposes could be dictated by broad wording within the institutional mission.

Some examples:

- An institution with an educational mission shaped by its religious affiliation might have the stated purpose of transmitting a specific doctrine.
- An institution with a strong professional program might have the stated purpose of assuring that students gain specific skills required for licensure in that profession.
- Public institutions might have the stated purpose of contributing to the economic development of the city or state or providing a variety of services to the people in a specific geographical area.
- Research universities might have stated purposes concerning the support of theoretical and applied research.

It will be important for the institution to state these "other purposes" and to provide evidence that it is effectively fulfilling them. Since these "other purposes" will differ from institution to institution, it is not possible to provide generic examples of the information that would best document such achievement.

The Role of Assessment of Student Academic Achievement in This Criterion

The pattern of evidence for Criterion Three emphasizes the Commission's commitment to the use of assessment in evaluating and improving teaching and learning in its affiliated institutions. The pattern of evidence for Criterion Four also illustrates this commitment.

In 1989 the Commission began its assessment initiative. By July 1995, all affiliated institutions either had filed an assessment plan with the Commission or had shared the plan with an on-site team. At its meeting in February 1996, the Commission reaffirmed its expectation that all affiliated institutions have ongoing programs for assessing academic achievement both to assure that students are learning what faculty intend to teach and to identify ways to improve the instruction.

Commission Statement on Assessment of Student Academic Achievement

In October 1989 the Commission called on all of its affiliated institutions to develop institutional programs that assess and document student academic achievement. At that time, the Commission reaffirmed its long-standing practice that for an institution to be accredited, it must be accomplishing its educational and other purposes. The evaluation of overall institutional effectiveness continues to be an essential part of the accreditation process. However, this Statement reaffirms the Commission position taken October 1989, and repeated in August 1993, that assessing student academic achievement is an essential component of evaluating overall institutional effectiveness. While the Commission understands that the measurement of learning outcomes is only one aspect of a total, effective educational program, it recognizes that assessment data contribute to successful decision-making within an institution, particularly in curriculum and faculty development.

The Commission's expectation that institutions have effective programs to assess student achievement is now embedded in its Criteria for Accreditation: "The institution is accomplishing its educational and other purposes" (Criterion Three) and "The institution can continue to accomplish its purposes and strengthen its educational effectiveness" (Criterion Four). The patterns of evidence for these criteria illustrate the centrality of an effective assessment program in documenting the effectiveness of an institution's educational programs and the institution's commitment and capacity to strengthen those programs. Although the Commission does not specify a specific pattern of evidence necessary to assure that an institution meets these two criteria, it continues to expect that a program of assessment of student academic achievement exists and that its usefulness be a key indicator of how well an institution meets them.

The Commission does not prescribe a specific methodology for assessment. Instead, it calls on each institution to structure an assessment program around its stated mission and educational purposes. The Commission recognizes that the missions of institutions lead them to assess academic achievement at different times during the students' academic experience and in different ways. Since the Commission's action of 1989, member institutions, evaluation teams, Commission staff, and other organizations have engaged, singly and cooperatively, in learning about assessment and its value for improving faculty teaching and student learning. Out of this endeavor has emerged a broad understanding of the ways in which assessment can deepen our understanding of the educational process and improve student learning—undergraduate, graduate, and professional.

The program to assess student learning should emerge from and be sustained by a faculty and administrative commitment of excellent teaching and effective learning; provide explicit and public statements regarding the institution's expectations for student learning; and use the information gained from the systematic collection and examination of assessment data both to document and improve student learning. A strong assessment program is founded on a plan that is widely accepted and routinely updated, it is ongoing, and it is related to other planning and budgeting processes.

Now the Commission expects that its institutions are implementing programs to assess student learning that build on the plans reviewed through Commission processes between 1991 and 1995.

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The Commission also reaffirms its objectives for its affiliated institutions in this assessment initiative: to encourage excellence in the teaching provided students and improvement in the learning achieved by them. While it is important that an institution respond fully and accurately to a variety of public demands for accountability, the Commission is committed to the tenet that assessment of student academic achievement is key to improving student learning. Therefore, assessment of student academic achievement is critical to the future health of its institutions, to the educational accomplishments of students now and in the future, and to the enhanced perception by the public of the value of higher education.

Approved by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
February 22, 1996

An acceptable pattern of evidence for Criterion Three should demonstrate that the institution documents the academic achievement of its students. The pattern that follows proposes that an appropriate assessment program will **document**

◇ proficiency in skills and competencies essential for all college-educated adults;

◇ completion of an identifiable and coherent undergraduate level general education component; and

◇ mastery of the level of knowledge appropriate to the degree attained.

The pattern outlines some of the basic objectives that every assessment program should strive to achieve. Many institutions will have more **educational** objectives central to their mission and purposes, and, therefore, basic to their assessment program.

Some examples:

◊ A research university might have the educational objective of assuring that its graduate students are skilled in conducting basic or applied research. The assessment program should document student achievement of that objective.

◊ A state legislature mandates that its public colleges produce honest and hard-working graduates who care about others and about the environment. Assessing how the curricula help to shape students' character traits will be an important element of the assessment programs of colleges in this state system.

◊ A church-related college has the educational goal of graduating students who understand and value the life of service to the faith and/or the denomination. The assessment program should document student achievement of these objectives.

◊ A selective art institute claims that its graduates will appreciate the fine and creative arts. Its assessment program should evaluate student achievement of this goal.

The Commission has not been prescriptive about the particular design of an institutional assessment program. Still many institutions have sought more specific guidance on Commission expectations. Through its experience and from staff analysis of team and review panel reports the Commission has learned that effective assessment programs are marked by the following:

1. A strong, readily-identifiable relationship exists between overall institutional mission and objectives and the specific educational objectives of individual departments or programs.

2. Faculty, including on-campus and off-campus faculty, own and drive the program and use it to find ways to improve the education they provide. The institution motivates, recognizes, and rewards faculty efforts in assessment.

3. Authority for the design and operation of assessment is shared throughout the faculty and administration. Strong campus-wide assessment committees are invaluable to the assessment effort, and every strong assessment program is marked by at least one highly-regarded coordinating/steering committee.

4. Typically, an individual, not a group, is responsible for overseeing the assessment efforts of the institution. A committee structure usually cannot be expected to provide ongoing administrative coordination of campus-wide assessment programs. The responsible individual might be the Chief Academic Officer, another administrator, or a program coordinator, but there should be a person all can hold accountable for the oversight of the institution's academic assessment program.

5. Assessment might be included within a broader structure of regular program review, but the evaluation of instruction and faculty performance common to such programs does not in itself constitute assessment of student learning.

6. Feedback loops are essential. Programs that have as the only goal accountability (e.g., gain evidence that all graduates achieve a given level of competence as measured by a national exam) characteristically fail to provide faculty with information useful to the improvement of instruction and learning. Faculty need feedback on a regular, periodic basis.

7. Students should understand the purposes of assessment. Some institutions provide information about assessment in a variety of student-oriented publications. Some include students on assessment committees.

8. Institutions should measure student learning using a variety of direct and indirect measures and methods. Institutions should also consider incorporating into their programs measures of cognitive learning (knowledge acquisition), behavioral learning (skill acquisition), and affective learning (attitudinal development). Serious assessment programs strive to understand the strengths and weaknesses of various sources of information and methods of gathering assessment data:

    ◇ **direct indicators of learning** include pre- and post-testing; capstone courses; oral examinations; internships; portfolio assessments; evaluation of capstone projects, theses, or dissertations; standardized national exams; locally developed tests, performance on licensure, certification, or professional exams; and juried reviews and performances.

    ◇ **indirect indicators of learning** might include information gathered from alumni, employers, and students; graduation rates; retention and transfer studies; graduate follow-up studies; success of students in subsequent institutional settings; and job placement data.

    ◇ **data collection methods** include paper and pencil testing, essays and writing samples, portfolio collections of student work, exit interviews, surveys, focused group interviews, the use of external evaluators, logs and journals, behavioral observations, and many other research tools. Research methods should be tailored to the type of data to be gathered and the degree of reliability required.

It is essential that strong assessment programs be linked to curricular budget and planning processes at the institution. It is also essential that the assessment program be cost-effective (see the discussion of an appropriate pattern of evidence for Criterion Four).

Every institutional self-study and every evaluation team must judge the strength and usefulness of an institution's assessment program. Inevitably a good program will have as one of its basic documents an Assessment Plan that is routinely reviewed and revised both to guide the program and to summarize it succinctly. Evaluation teams will never make a critical decision about an institution's affiliation with the Commission **solely** on the basis of the institution's program for assessing student academic achievement, but they may determine that through ongoing Commission monitoring an institution should be required to enhance its program.

For example:

- A comprehensive university develops an assessment program designed by each of its principal schools. Although every school has an effective, dynamic assessment program underway, some of the schools include the assessment of general education and some do not. Consequently, the total institutional assessment program does not address general education. The team might choose to require no further monitoring if it learns that the University has committed itself to wrestling with the development of a sound assessment program for general education and knows the institution's solid track record of keeping its commitments.

- A community college participates in state-mandated program review that primarily emphasizes a few accountability measures. The program produces evidence that students transfer to other colleges with no appreciable grade loss, and that students educated for careers usually find suitable employment. The curriculum committee is the campus assessment committee; annually it reviews the report to the state prepared by the Vice President for Academic Affairs. When the team learns that this is the only response the institution has made to assessment, it recommends a focused visit on assessment.

- A private, liberal arts college has an assessment program administered by a faculty committee led by a highly regarded member of the faculty. The team discovers that the success of assessment on the campus rests heavily on this method of faculty ownership and control. The various ways that faculty changed courses and instructional techniques based on what they learned from assessment impresses the team. The team expresses concern about the ongoing administration of the program but compliments the institution for its assessment program.

The Role of General Education in This Criterion

General Institutional Requirement #16 calls for general education "consistent with" an institution's mission and "designed to ensure breadth of knowledge and to promote intellectual inquiry." By including general education as evidence appropriate to documenting that an institution meets this criterion, the Commission reemphasizes that all undergraduate degree programs must include general education. Moreover, the suggested pattern of evidence, in addition to asking for documentable achievement that reflects "an identifiable and coherent undergraduate general education component," also suggests some other types of evidence that speak to the goals of general education:

- a clearly defined statement of philosophy and objective of its general education requirements;
- courses that "stimulate the examination and understanding of personal, social, and civic values";
- courses that ensure "proficiency in skills and competencies essential for all college-educated adults."

- **Ways to describe a general education program.** If a general education program is based on **curricular patterns,** basic areas of academic study typically would include, but not be limited to communications, mathematics, humanities, behavioral or social sciences, natural sciences, and computer literacy. If a general education program is based on **cognitive experiences,** it will typically describe its program in terms of the college-level experiences that engender such competencies as the following:

- **Capabilities in** reading, writing, speaking, listening; abstract inquiry; critical thinking; logical reasoning
- **Understanding of** numerical data, scientific inquiry, global issues, historical perspectives, literary and/or philosophical, expression of ideas
- **Development of** ethical perspectives, cultural diversity value systems
- **Appreciation for** fine and performing arts

Different types of institutions typically establish different objectives for general education.

Some examples:

- A two-year institution whose curriculum is largely technical in nature might emphasize the applied aspects of general education (writing, problem solving, decision making, adapting to change, interpersonal skills) that have, historically, prepared graduates both for careers and for continuing education. The credit transfer issues, however, should be studied carefully and students must understand whether general education will meet expectations of receiving institutions.
- A four-year institution with an historic emphasis on the liberal arts typically strives to ensure that its students have a broad range of intellectual experiences that provide the context for advanced and specialized studies.

- **General education in unique institutional contexts.** As higher education changes, so too do the ways in which institutions provide strong general education programs.

Some examples:

- A single-purpose, professional institution might contract with a state university or a private institution to provide the general education courses it requires its students to take.
- A state might mandate that all or part of the general education components of degree programs be provided by neighboring or "related" institutions.
- A small college might turn to components of the general education program available through purchased curricula (e.g., PBS) or consortia-based curricula.

However, the fact that the general education faculty might not be on the campus does not diminish the need for the institution to "own" the general education program. It is essential that the institution state its basic philosophy of general education and tie this statement to its system of delivery. It is critical that a faculty demonstrate control over the general education program it prescribes for its students through such means as shared committee oversight, institution-developed means of assessing the effectiveness of the general education program, and strong faculty commitment to the role of general education within the overall curriculum.

☐ A Special Note on Graduate Education

Throughout its history, the Commission has acknowledged the unique nature of graduate education under the broader umbrella of higher education. Over the years it has provided guidance on what constitutes quality graduate education. While the Commission recognizes the changing nature of graduate education in the late twentieth century, it continues to recognize the need for institutions offering it to adhere to fundamental precepts of quality.

In this context, the Commission continues to expect:

- graduate education to be both more focused in content and purpose and more intellectually demanding than undergraduate education;
- graduate faculty to possess terminal degrees appropriate to the instruction they provide;
- graduate faculty and graduate students to be engaged in scholarship involving research and practice as appropriate to the discipline or field;
- graduate faculty and graduate students interacting frequently with opportunities for individual student-faculty discussion and advising;
- an academic governance structure for graduate education that assures the quality of graduate offerings through such means as reviewing the rigor and currency of courses, evaluating the coherence of certificate and degree programs, and measuring the achievement of stated educational objectives;
- full and accurate information provided by the institution to students and to the public about its graduate offerings, appropriately distinguishing among free-standing courses, certificate programs, and degree programs.

Some examples:

- A research university contracts with a major corporation to deliver an M.B.A. program to the corporation sites in the United States. Using computers, interactive T.V., and mentor-led sessions, the university assures the quality of faculty and curricula; through clearly-stated office hours, WATS lines, and live on-line sessions, the university enables strong group and individual interaction with faculty.
- A baccalaureate institution has decided to mount its first graduate program. It hires a doctorally-prepared program director who develops the curriculum by working with existing doctorally-prepared faculty supplemented by consultants from strong graduate programs. The new program includes an assessment component and is slated for external and internal review every five years.
- A state institution historically focused on undergraduate education develops three graduate programs during the last decade. With a new state mandate to offer more graduate education, the institution develops a graduate council under the administration of a graduate dean; it develops an institution-wide definition of credentials required for teaching graduate courses; and it cooperates with graduate faculties at other state universities to supplement on-campus offerings with live satellite delivery of graduate courses.

☐ Assessing the Contribution of Learning Resources to the Education of Students

The requirement that institutions provide their students with access to books and other requisite learning resources grows out of a broadly-held conviction that the development of critical analytic and research skills requires students to experience a variety of intellectual viewpoints and play an active role in interpreting, evaluating, and synthesizing the information available to them. Therefore, the involvement of the library—and librarians—in the institution's education programs is essential. Faculty and librarians share in the responsibility of emphasizing information literacy in all programs. Implementation of a regularly-updated collection development policy, formulated collaboratively by faculty and library staff, is one hallmark of an institution that takes the educational role of its learning resources seriously; collaboration on course development is another.

Assessing learning resources used by students is yet a third hallmark. Faculty and librarians should move beyond collecting gross circulation numbers to evaluating student use of reference materials and electronic media, and to assessing browsing, circulation transactions (what and to whom), document delivery, and inter-library loans. Higher education library staff need to evaluate their overall efforts, to collect evidence that something worthwhile is happening to students because the library exists. How, where, and in what form to collect this information are up to each institution, and the effective use of the information to improve its learning resources depends on an institution's traditions, structure, orientation, and particular situation.

☐ A Special Note on Accelerated and Non-Traditional Course Schedules

Currently, academic credit is the common denominator when institutions account for student learning and academic progress through a course of study. It is important as a means of quantifying study and learning (e.g., in defining "full-time student"), and as a mechanism by which institutions can grant credit for transfer of courses taken at other institutions or assess prior learning.

Although some relationship may exist, the number of hours of seat time in a classroom setting does not, by itself, determine the scope of learning. How much study students do outside of formal classes, the level of expectation in the course, the preparation of the students, and the pedagogical methods used, all play major roles. Therefore, the Commission does not require every institution to follow the traditional Carnegie formula, and recognizes that there are institutions offering, for example, three semester credit courses that do not meet the traditional three hours per week for a 15-16 week semester.

The Commission does expect, however, that all institutions assess rigorously the learning students attain as a result of the courses they take. In particular, the Commission expects institutions offering courses in accelerated or other non-traditional formats to be especially diligent in documenting that students in these courses achieve the mastery of skills and knowledge expected of students in traditional courses.

☐ The Role of Accomplishment of Purposes in the Accreditation Process

This criterion, by specifically mentioning "educational and other purposes," makes clear that the evaluation of the quality of the curricula, teaching, and learning at an institution is central to the accreditation process. In part, the evaluation rests on the structure and content of the curricula and the effectiveness of the instruction offered by the institution's faculty; in part it rests on the documentable academic achievement of the students who complete the curricula. If assessment is to have any real impact on higher education, it must directly link student achievement to both the structure and content of the educational program and to the effectiveness of teaching. That is why the Commission included both teaching and learning in Criterion Three.

For the Commission, though, **institutional effectiveness** is much broader in scope than **educational effectiveness.** The language of Criterion Three reflects the Commission's practice of basing accrediting decisions on how well an institution accomplishes *all* of its purposes, through the use of the words "educational and other purposes." Thus, evaluation of overall institutional effectiveness is dependent upon the institution's documentation of how well it is accomplishing not only its educational purposes, but also all other purposes and objectives needed in order to fulfill its mission.

Documenting that the institution is accomplishing its goals and purposes goes far toward answering public calls for institutional accountability. The Commission itself shares the public concern as to whether institutions actually do what they claim to do. Therefore, the Commission must follow an accrediting process that includes a significant component of institutional accountability. Obviously, then, the accrediting process weighs carefully the adequacy of the evidence provided by an institution to support the claim that it "is accomplishing its educational and other purposes."

☐ Institutional Self-Study and Team Evaluation for This Criterion

For an institution to determine whether it is accomplishing its purposes, its Self-Study Report should do more than provide institutional research documents, program review reports, and some community and student surveys. Documentation for "accomplishment" involves determining whether the institution

◇ understands both its central educational purposes and the information necessary to confirm that it achieves them,

◇ understands the values of higher education and can show that its activities successfully reflect and transmit those values,

◇ both understands and strives to fulfill all of its various stated purposes, and

◇ understands the relationship between its resources and programs and its achievements.

A thorough self-study process examines the structure and nature of the institution's educational programs. For years many institutions have accomplished this through periodic program review. Whether implemented to meet state requirements or initiated to enhance internal decision-making, program review constitutes an important step in this evaluation process. However, rather than merely describing the resources supporting a program, the Self-Study Report should evaluate the outcomes of the program. Rather than using student achievement figures only as evidence of the strength of the program, the results of the institution's assessment of student academic achievement should provide constituencies a way to learn about the actual effectiveness of the teaching and learning within the program.

As discussed earlier in this section, assessment is one of the most important ways to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Because of the Commission's initiative on assessment, every self-study process will need to pay special attention to the effectiveness of the institution's assessment program.

Program review and student assessment provide two of the most important means of documenting accomplishment of an institution's educational objectives. But they are not the only important signs of an institutional commitment to educational effectiveness.

Some examples:

◇ An institution is committed to support basic research that will develop new knowledge. It might wish to submit lists of faculty publications, awards faculty have received for their contributions to research, and grants given to faculty and students for independent study or creative activity.

◇ An institution affiliated with religious bodies may have purposes directly related to the requirements of those bodies, especially in terms of expected behaviors. The institution may document how well these behaviors, values, and/or attitudes have been acquired by its students.

◇ An institution may have as a stated purpose meeting the instructional and cultural needs of its immediate community. An institution with such a purpose might provide confirmation from community agencies or industries that specific academic programs or not-for-credit instruction have been designed to meet those needs.

◇ An institution could have as a stated purpose the efficient delivery of quality educational programs through the utilization of distance and interactive technology. Such technology affects planning and budgets. An institution's capacity to offer effective programs will in part be shaped by the investment it makes to ensure the integrity of those programs, as well as its investment of time and energy into structures that tap and harness the talents of many institutional constituencies on behalf of the institution.

Because higher education is concerned with the personal development and well-being of the student, this criterion also includes the accomplishment of stated purposes concerning student support services. How purposes of this nature will be evaluated will differ from institution to institution.

Some examples:

◊ At some institutions the collegiate experience is structured to ensure that the development of religious, civic, and/or philosophical values occurs.

◊ Many institutions assist students to gain access to and to use a variety of social and psychological services that will support the students' transitions while at college.

The accomplishment of stated purposes concerning student services and student support must be evaluated. In a time of heightened concern about the educational effectiveness of institutions of higher education, attention must be given to these and other significant purposes.

☐ Pattern of Evidence Supporting This Criterion

The institutional self-study process and its subsequent report should review a considerable variety of materials. **In developing the pattern of evidence supporting Criterion Three, the Commission suggests the breadth of review that it considers appropriate to this criterion.**

a. educational programs appropriate to an institution of higher education:

  ○ courses of study in the academic programs that are clearly defined, coherent, and intellectually rigorous;

  ○ programs that include courses and/or activities whose purpose is to stimulate the examination and understanding of personal, social, and civic values;

  ○ programs that require of the faculty and students (as appropriate to the level of the educational program) the use of scholarship and/or the participation in research as part of the programs;

  ○ programs that require intellectual interaction between student and faculty and encourage it between student and student.

b. assessment of appropriate student academic achievement in all its programs, documenting:

  ○ proficiency in skills and competencies essential for all college-educated adults;

  ○ completion of an identifiable and coherent undergraduate level general education component; and

  ○ mastery of the level of knowledge appropriate to the degree attained.

c. graduate programs that:

  ○ distinguish clearly graduate from undergraduate offerings;

  ○ expect students and faculty to value and engage in research, scholarship, and creative activity;

  ○ are approved, taught, and evaluated by a graduate faculty that possesses appropriate credentials and experience;

  ○ use results of regular internal and external peer review processes to ensure quality.

d. transcripts that follow commonly accepted practices and accurately reflect student learning.

e. effective teaching that characterizes its courses and academic programs.

f. ongoing support for professional development for faculty, staff, and administrators.

g. student services that effectively support the institution's purposes.

h. staff and faculty service that contributes to the institution's effectiveness.

i. if appropriate:

  ○ evidence of support for the stated commitment to basic and applied research through provision of sufficient human, financial, and physical resources to produce effective research;

  ○ evidence of support for the stated commitment to the fine and creative arts through provision of sufficient human, financial, and physical resources to produce creative endeavors and activities;

  ○ evidence of effective delivery of educational and other services to its community;

  ○ evidence of development and offering of effective courses and programs to meet the needs of its sponsoring organization and other special constituencies.

☐ Other Types of Evidence Appropriate for This Criterion

Although the preceding sections suggest the ways in which most institutions will proceed in attempting to document the accomplishment of their educational and other purposes, a few that have very specific purposes unique to them or to a limited number of similar institutions, may need to develop additional types of evidence.

Some examples:

◊ Institutions such as land grant universities have specific purposes related to education and research in applied fields, such as agriculture and home economics. Special attention to their influence on those fields might be appropriate.

◊ Some institutions have purposes related to a targeted population (e.g., underprepared students, members of a Native American tribe, working adults). They should include evidence related to their accomplishments with those specific populations.

◊ An institution that has as one of its purposes the inculcation of certain values might evaluate the evidence of its effectiveness in accomplishing that purpose.

◊ A college that states the purpose of assuring the employability of its students might provide evidence about how successful it is in placing its students and how well they perform on the job.

☐ Weighing Types of Evidence in Determining Whether This Criterion Is Met

The Commission has determined that the results of an institution's program of assessment will provide important evidence of how well this criterion is met. But because specific institutions have different configurations in which certain educational and other purposes are more prominent than others, those institutions and teams evaluating them will need to pay particular attention to the ways in which they document their accomplishment.

Some examples:

- An institution is heavily engaged in providing extension education and in-house, customized training programs. It might show strong evidence that it fulfills the stated purposes of meeting broader public needs, even while assuring the strength and quality of its traditional academic programs.
- An institution invests in good support services (e.g., libraries and laboratories) but its educational programs do not utilize those services. It can expect the Commission to question the quality of its educational programs and its commitment to excellence in teaching and learning.
- An institutional assessment program relies almost solely on student satisfaction surveys. Such evidence alone is insufficient to support the institution's claims that it appropriately documents student academic achievement.
- An institution has a significantly underprepared student population and is suffering high attrition but offers no support services such as advising, developmental instruction, and personalized tutoring. That will challenge its claims that its few graduates testify to achievement of its educational purposes.

FOCUS ON CRITERION FOUR

"The institution can continue to accomplish its purposes and strengthen its educational effectiveness."

☐ Commission Meaning of "Can Continue to Accomplish Its Purposes"

If accreditation is to serve both educators and the public, it is necessary that the process result in an informed estimate of the institution's future viability and effectiveness. While accreditation cannot guarantee that an institution will always have the resources to continue to accomplish its purposes, it does represent the best peer judgment about the institution's prospects for the future at the time of the evaluation.

This criterion assumes that Criterion One and Criterion Three are met. That is, the institution's understanding of its centrally stated purposes is certain and its record to date shows that it accomplishes those purposes. Criterion Four is not about basic institutional survival; it is about continued institutional achievement of agreed-upon purposes.

☐ Commission Meaning of "Strengthen Its Educational Effectiveness"

In choosing to affiliate with the Commission, an institution not only seeks external validation of its accomplishments, it also accepts the responsibility to find ways to improve the educational programs it offers. To meet this criterion, it will need to have the resources necessary to maintain strengths, correct weaknesses, and respond to a changing society's instructional needs.

◇ **Planning for educational improvement.** Much can be learned about an institution's commitment to improving its educational programs by studying its planning and budgeting documents. These documents reflect the institution's awareness of where it needs to change in order to improve.

◇ **Building on assessment.** In 1989 the Commission approved its current assessment initiative. Institutions anxious to learn whether they actually are accomplishing what they claim to be doing inevitably discover ways in which they might improve.

◇ **Growing from the self-study process.** Since the preparation of a Self-Study Report is an exercise in self-evaluation, the results should contribute directly to institutional improvement. The thoroughness and honesty with which the institution conducts its self-study indicates much about its commitment to acknowledge those areas in which it could become more effective. The findings of the self-study process should be directly incorporated into the institution's plans to correct its weaknesses and enhance its strengths. Those, in turn, could be expressed through the allocation of resources provided for in the institution's operating budgets.

■ **A Note on "Building on Assessment."** In recent years the Commission has argued that an effective program for assessing student academic achievement is a key piece of evidence in support of an institution's claims that it can strengthen its educational effectiveness. The discussion of Criterion Three summarized some of the lessons the Commission is learning about the most salient features of effective assessment programs. But it has been obvious since the Commission began its Assessment Initiative in 1989 that unless an institution was prepared to integrate assessment into its institutional budgeting and planning, even the best assessment program would soon fail. In short, the long-range success of assessment of student learning—and its ability to enhance educational quality—depends on several key factors:

◇ the governing board supports the assessment of student learning across the institution's educational programs;

◇ senior executive officers provide leadership and support for assessment;

◇ sufficient resources are allocated to sustain ongoing assessment efforts;

◇ funds are available to support changes that need to be made to enhance student academic achievement;

◇ all planning and budgeting processes include ways in which assessment information can influence institutional priorities.

But structures and processes only assure that assessment can be an effective tool for "strengthening educational effectiveness." Because all institutions affiliated with the Commission will have had their assessment plans reviewed prior to the end of the 1995-96 academic year, Evaluation Teams should now expect to find evidence that the plans have led to an assessment program that is operational. Teams should expect all institutions to have moved beyond planning for assessment; they will expect to find evidence of "structured assessment processes that are continuous, that involve a variety of institutional constituencies, and that provide meaningful and useful information to the planning processes as well as to students, faculty, and administration."

☐ The Role of Institutional Planning In This Criterion

Sometimes this criterion is referred to as the "planning criterion" because the Commission considers planning to be an important indicator of a pattern of evidence for Criterion Four. The Commission is aware that in the past some institutions with relatively little formal planning have continued to accomplish their purposes through abundant resources and dynamic leadership. The Commission is also cognizant of institutions with sound planning practices that have been unable to continue to fulfill their mission or to remain financially viable. Increasingly, however, the institution with a structured, ongoing planning process is better prepared to improve its strengths, address its weaknesses, and meet the opportunities and challenges to its future.

An effective planning process offers the means to modify goals, to alter or develop programs and methods of instruction, to cope with shifting levels and sources of support, and continually to strengthen institutional vitality. An effective planning process

- ◇ is ongoing, involving representatives of all constituencies;
- ◇ takes into account present and projected internal and external circumstances that can affect the institution;
- ◇ results in a written, annually-updated document that has widespread usefulness throughout the institution;
- ◇ enumerates annually the accomplishments, obstacles, or other changes accommodated through modification of the previous year's plan.

In Criterion Four, the Commission, while emphasizing the importance of planning, presents one of several important factors that contributes most directly to assuring continuous improvement. Judgments about the probability of an institution's future vitality include consideration of its past success, its present strength, and its planning for the future.

☐ The Role of "Strengthen Its Educational Effectiveness" In the Accreditation Process

In a time of significant change, forecasting the future is an uncertain business. Demographic shifts and financial upheavals can occur with unanticipated speed. New technologies shape the workplace and the very nature of the educational process. The accrediting decision must weigh an institution's understanding of the changing environment in which it exists. Because reasonable people can disagree on what is the best strategy for the future, Evaluation Teams will seldom make an accrediting decision solely on future plans. In situations where the inability to plan reflects larger institutional troubles, this criterion might bear considerable weight.

Some examples:

- ◊ An institution's main campus enrollment has been declining steadily for five years, but off-campus programs have helped to offset the financial impact. The on-campus assessment program produces convincing evidence of students achieving institutional expectations, but the off-campus programs are included in the assessment program selectively and sporadically. When the team receives evidence that the off-campus programs are held in low repute by area employers, the team calls for a focused visit in two years on the off-campus programs and indicates in the report that the focused team will expect to find strengthened programs that also are integrated into the institution's assessment program.
- ◊ An institution, significantly in debt, apparently unable for several years to reverse downward trends in enrollment presents unrealistic plans for addressing these problems. This might lead a team to doubt its capacity to continue into the future.
- ◊ An institution has achieved fiscal stability at the expense of the quality of its educational programs with no apparent sense of how to enhance its education without incurring unwanted debt. This may cause a team to question whether this criterion is met.

☐ Institutional Self-Study and Team Evaluation for This Criterion

Some academic leaders believe that a clue to future performance is how well an institution has responded to past challenges. Others believe that in this period of dramatic, constant change unknown to previous generations, past performance may be unrelated to how well an institution will respond to present opportunities and challenges. Regardless of view, some useful indicators of present and future stability and resilience include:

- ◇ stability of the institutional leadership–board, president, administration, and faculty–and its implication for the future;
- ◇ stability of human, financial, and physical resources and how they position the institution to meet opportunities and threats;
- ◇ governance structures and processes that enable the institution's leadership to respond quickly and appropriately to changing external and internal circumstances;
- ◇ institutional assessment and planning efforts and their apparent effect on academic planning and student academic achievement.

Self-Study Reports should identify the plans and structures through which institutions maintain strengths and address concerns. The self-study should both identify and weigh existing short- and long-range plans–including strategic, tactical, and operational planning–and the institution's past record of planning. Too often, institutional planning processes focus solely on finances and facilities. Important as those areas are, the relationship between them and the improvement of the educational program should be clear.

The Commission is committed strongly to the tenet that all institutions can improve the education they provide. It expects the self-study process and report both to identify critical areas in need of improvement and to indicate how an institution intends to make those improvements.

☐ Pattern of Evidence Supporting This Criterion

As the previous discussion suggests, the institution's planning process and its academic planning process are important components of the institutional Self-Study Report. Planning alone, however, is not adequate. **In developing the pattern of evidence to support Criterion Four, the Commission suggests the breadth of review that it considers appropriate.**

a. a current resource base–financial, physical, and human–that positions the institution for the future.

b. decision-making processes with tested capability of responding effectively to anticipated and unanticipated challenges to the institution.

c. structured assessment processes that are continuous, that involve a variety of institutional constituencies, and that provide meaningful and useful information to the planning processes as well as to students, faculty, and administration.

d. plans as well as ongoing, effective planning processes necessary to the institution's continuance.

e. resources organized and allocated to support its plans for strengthening both the institution and its programs.

☐ Other Types of Evidence Appropriate for This Criterion

As with each of the other criteria, there will be some institutions whose specialized purpose or unique circumstances require them to present additional types of evidence to support their claim that they fulfill Criterion Four.

Some examples:

- A public institution has experienced significant decline in enrollment but recently has been mandated by the state to serve as the primary deliverer of a few specific programs throughout the state. It should weigh the potential impact of this mandate and, if appropriate, use it as evidence of new possibilities for future growth and educational quality.
- A church-related institution has enjoyed strong, continuous support from congregations. It should evaluate whether it can rely on this support for future funding. If there are documents to this effect, they could provide evidence of continued financial viability.
- An institution has been financially stable for many years, although almost totally tuition driven. It might assess whether it can rely on adequate numbers of students and levels of tuition to continue to fund its operations in the coming decade. The results could offer evidence of continuing viability.
- A single purpose institution offers only programs that require professional accreditation for licensure. It should evaluate likely changes, both in the profession itself and in the specialized accrediting body, that might affect the content and structure of its programs. The institution's ability to prepare for the impact of these external forces might predict its future success.

☐ Weighing Types of Evidence in Determining Whether This Criterion Is Met

Different institutions will face different opportunities and challenges to their continuing ability to accomplish their purposes and to strengthen their educational effectiveness. An institution may wish to provide additional evidence of its ability to utilize opportunities that circumstances present.

Some examples:

- An institution has a very short record of fiscal stability but an excellent reputation for providing quality education to a growing minority community. It should document the enthusiasm of its supporters, but its ability to forecast reasonably a longer record of fiscal stability might be critical to its future.
- An institution has survived many years with limited financial resources. It should provide careful projections of future funding and strategies it intends to utilize to strengthen its educational effectiveness within financial constraints. It should emphasize the lessons it has learned from its past, drawing attention to what it sees as a proven record of operating adequately on limited resources.
- An institution is improving its reputation for educational excellence through a well-planned campaign that publicly discloses the results of its student assessment program. It may use that evidence, if it can be documented, to support its claims that its rather poor prior record of effective institutional planning is being corrected.
- An institution has strong board leadership in planning and a solid record of seeing plans through to completion. This will outweigh the short-term dislocation caused by recent unanticipated administrative turnover.

◊ Because it replaced its chief academic officer, an institution did not actually implement the assessment program it so carefully planned. Moreover, academic planning now appears to be driven largely by the desire to institute "niche" programs that will offset the decline in traditional students. Yet each new "niche" program appears to have assessment of student learning integrated into program design and evaluation. Seeing that the institution understands and is committed to assessment in these new programs and appreciating the work that went into the designed but never-implemented assessment program, the team recommends a monitoring report on assessment in two years. The text of the report states that if the report does not provide dependable evidence that the assessment program is operating, a focused visit on assessment should be conducted.

FOCUS ON CRITERION FIVE

"The institution demonstrates integrity in its practices and relationships."

☐ Commission Meaning of "Integrity"

The higher education community has often assumed that because of its traditional commitment to the pursuit of truth, its institutional behavior is beyond reproach and that the public should trust in this. But institutions of higher education are as vulnerable to error as are all other social institutions. During the past decade, some widely-reported lapses in institutional integrity have brought into new focus the relationship between institutional integrity and institutional accreditation.

By integrity, the Commission means that an institution adheres both to the civil laws and to the code of ethics commonly accepted by the academic community. Such values are reflected by an institution's

◊ expression of the ethical values it has adopted through institutional policies and procedures, made public in its public documents and contractual arrangements;

◊ assurance that its practices are consistent with its publicly stated policies;

◊ expectation that members of its constituencies (administration, faculty, and students) observe the tenets of academic honesty;

◊ practice of full disclosure in its dealings with members of the institution and its publics;

◊ operation, without conflict of interest, at the board, administrative, and faculty levels;

◊ living up to commitments it makes in all its public representations.

The Commission recognizes that an institution's history, tradition, and mission may shape its particular policies and practices. Consequently, the Commission does not prescribe any single set of principles to be followed by all institutions. It does expect each member institution to have a body of ethical values to which it subscribes and which inform institutional policies and procedures and guide institutional practices and relationships.

☐ Commission Meaning of "Practices and Relationships"

"Practices and relationships" implies a distinction between policies and procedures–between what the institution states in writing and its actions–how the institution actually carries out its activities as an educational and business organization.

Part of the accrediting process usually entails an audit of the institution's policies and procedures, confirming that the institution has addressed, in publicly available documents, such matters as academic honesty, nondiscrimination, affirmative action, harassment, professional ethics and conduct, and fair grievance processes.

All institutions of higher education affiliated with the Commission, even those closely held by a religious organization or a private owner, have public roles and responsibilities. Federal and state laws define many of those roles and responsibilities. In addition, there is a strong and enduring culture common to almost all institutions of higher education that both transmits its values and acceptable behaviors and determines additional roles and responsibilities for accredited institutions. With this criterion, the Commission goes beyond institutional behavior that is purely legal to include institutional behavior that reflects ethical values traditionally held by institutions of higher education for themselves and each other.

☐ The Role of Diversity and Equity in This Criterion

Institutions of higher education support faculty members' study of the impact on U.S. society of the growing diversity of its population—regarding ethnicity, race, religion, age, gender, and sexual orientation. Institutions also face the challenge of direct response to this diversity as it is reflected in their student bodies, faculty, or in the ethnic and cultural diversity found off the campus.

Responding to issues resurfacing in the 1980s and early 1990s regarding social concerns, multiculturalism and cultural diversity became more conscious concerns of the Commission. In 1991, the Commission adopted a statement that explained its expectations of affiliated institutions.

Commission Statement on Access, Equity, and Diversity

The Commission recognizes that much of the vitality in the American system of higher education comes from its broad spectrum of differing institutions, missions, and constituencies. Such diversity enriches the quality of American higher education and helps to prepare graduates to live and work in a culturally pluralistic, interdependent world.

Individual and group differences in ideas, viewpoints, perspectives, backgrounds, and values add richness to the teaching and learning process which can strengthen an institution. So, too, shared values, experiences, and purposes bring unity and a sense of community of common purpose to an institution. The Commission urges each institution to examine its own character, to find its proper balance between the benefits of diversity and the values of community, and to communicate these views to the public. However, regardless of specific institutional practices, the Commission expects an institution to create and maintain a teaching and learning environment that supports sensitivity to diverse individuals and groups. Further, the Commission expects an affiliated institution to discourage acts of racism, sexism, bigotry, harassment, and violence while it teaches students and faculty alike to see in proper perspective the differences that separate and the commonalties that bind all peoples and cultures.

To create and maintain this environment, institutions should identify and correct any existing policies and practices that allow inequitable treatment of current and potential faculty, students, staff, and any other groups they serve. The Commission recognizes that an institution's history, tradition, and mission may shape its particular policies and practices; consequently, the Commission does not prescribe any single set of principles to be followed by all institutions. It does expect its members to be concerned with the integrity and equitable application of their institutional policies, and to publicize and explain thoughtfully those policies and practices to their constituencies and to the public.

Adopted by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
August 9, 1991

☐ The Role of Institutional Integrity in the Accreditation Process

With this new criterion, the Commission makes clear its intention to incorporate into its accrediting processes consideration of all matters that speak to the integrity with which an institution of higher education conducts its business. Over the past decade, the Commission has been particularly concerned about the questionable practices by which institutions seek, recruit, and admit students both in the United States and abroad; by advertising and recruitment materials that falsely present the institution's facilities and programs and/or propose quick and easy degrees; and by the abuse of multiple student financial aid programs.

Questionable practices relating to the management of student enrollments, however, are just a sampling of the high visibility issues that confront the Commission when considering the integrity of an institution. The major changes taking place in higher education require new applications of traditional, ethical values. Some of these changes are creative forms of financing the educational enterprise, consortia and cooperative initiatives for mounting and delivering educational programs, and growth of "non-traditional" faculty and students within the educational community.

In light of these changes, institutions and the Commission must consider and evaluate how institutional integrity relates to mission and purposes, to resources, to institutional effectiveness, and to institutional planning.

☐ Statements of Good Practice Promulgated by Other Organizations

From time to time, the Commission issues a formal statement through which it establishes a specific interpretation of certain matters concerning institutional integrity. The "Statement on Access, Equity, and Diversity" printed previously is one example. But the Commission also looks to a variety of other professional and educational organizations for assistance in defining principles of good practice and ethical behavior on specific matters. It does not anticipate developing its own statement on every significant matter involving institutional integrity.

The Commission **does not officially endorse** the statements provided by those organizations, **but it recommends** that affiliated institutions give them careful attention.

In Chapter Reference A, the Commission provides a list of these statements. The list is not meant to be exhaustive but, instead, to suggest the broad range of resources available to institutions in evaluating their own practices and relationships as they relate to institutional integrity.

☐ Institutional Self-Study and Team Evaluation for This Criterion

One excellent starting point for any institutional self-study and subsequent team evaluation regarding the institution's integrity in its practices and relationships would be the review and evaluation of the policies and procedures found in the institution's public documents. However, the mere publication of these policies and procedures is not sufficient. Their content and their implementation should be measured by whether

- stated policies and procedures are based on ethical values,
- institutional practices are in keeping with the policies and procedures regarding institutional integrity,
- full and candid disclosure is encouraged and practiced throughout the institution,
- practice shows that the institution lives up to commitments it makes to its students and to the public at large.

- **Ethical policies and procedures.** Criterion Five addresses the institution's expectations of the ethical behavior of individuals within each of its constituencies (board members, administrators, staff members, faculty, and students). It also addresses the basic underlying attitude an institution takes toward those constituencies, other institutions, and the public at large. A self-study process that includes critical examination of institutional policies and procedures will go far in identifying commitment to those expectations and that attitude.

- **Full disclosure.** A self-study process should identify all situations that obligate an institution to full disclosure. Full disclosure means that an institution responds as honestly as possible and as fully as law and professional ethics require in its relationships with its constituencies and its publics. It is obvious that certain matters must be confidential and are so protected by law. But institutional integrity should require that appropriate and accurate information be given to those who need or request it.

  Some examples:

  - The catalog is the primary document through which current and prospective students learn about the institution. Too often it contains a misleading list of courses, including many that are seldom taught and some that have not been taught for years.

  - Institutions that own and operate subcorporations, especially those that provide services to students such as bookstores or other campus businesses directed to students, should clearly identify the relationship. If the institution contracts such services, the students should be aware of those contractual ties.

  - Fundraising groups or divisions of public institutions, particularly those that are separately incorporated and not directly answerable to the governing board of the institution, should be openly and clearly defined.

  As institutions turn to complex relationships with supporting and subsidiary groups, whether wholly-owned by the institution or related through tradition, it is important that those affected and those interested be able to understand those relationships. Full disclosure should require that they be completely, accurately, and clearly set forth in publicly available documents. Those engaged in the self-study process or team evaluation will probably look first for such documents and analyze them carefully.

- **Relationships with internal constituencies.** An institution has internal constituencies and external publics. It is important that the institution practices honesty and candor in its relationships with all of them. In dealing with internal constituencies, corporate by-laws, handbooks, manuals, and contracts usually set forth the basic relationship among these groups. The Commission does not prescribe organizational patterns or conditions for compensation and employment at an institution. However, it is appropriately concerned about the impact of such arrangements on the institution's ability to meet the Commission's criteria. Therefore, the institution in its self-study process and, subsequently, the Evaluation Team may want to review institutional publications and documents, such as minutes of faculty or student meetings where an officer has reported on important matters regarding the state of the institution, on issues facing the institution, or on specific matters affecting the constituency addressed; copies of the president's and other officers' public addresses; student newspaper articles; memos from faculty committees or officers to the entire institution.

- **Relationships with external publics.** Two places a self-study group or Evaluation Team may want to look for evidence of accurate self-representation in relations between the institution and its external publics are the public relations office and alumni publications. In fact, in an era marked by "marketing" of everything from educational programs to the value of the impact it has on the economy, an educational institution should evaluate with care how well it monitors the multiple marketing efforts that it mounts or that groups within it undertake.

  One significant trend in the past decade has been forming new international links. From new recruiting programs for foreign students to establishing branch campuses abroad, institutions have begun to communicate with people who have difficulty understanding the unique aspects of U.S. higher education and voluntary accreditation. An institution will want to evaluate the ways it presents itself to an international community.

Today, more and more institutions must seek funding from federal and state programs and organizations and from public and private foundations and philanthropists. They must also structure new relationships with sister institutions, business and industry, and other groups that either use the institution's services or help supply them. In all of these situations the need for honest and candid information about the institution increases. Frequently, problems in higher education result not from misapplication of resources or misrepresentation of the institution, but from ill-advised efforts to respond to unanticipated external inquiries with obfuscation and concealment.

A self-study process should include critical examination of documents released to the public and contractual agreements between the institution and other organizations to be sure that they are honest and candid and reflect ethical values.

- **Consistency between policies and practice.** Even the best crafted policies count for little if they fail to direct the actions of those who apply them. For example, over the past two decades, it has become routine for institutions to state publicly that discrimination is not practiced. In fact, institutional eligibility for many federal financial aid programs rests on an institution's professed commitment to non-discrimination. In many institutions affirmative action offices have been established to oversee the various institutional activities in which discrimination might occur. However, as with American society as a whole, discrimination is often hidden and subtle; few institutions have been able to eradicate it completely. An institution may wish to provide both statements of policy and records of activities and accomplishments that demonstrate its commitment to the elimination of discrimination in all its forms.
- **Living up to commitments.** Through its bylaws, catalogs, brochures, handbooks, policies and procedures, manuals, letters of appointment, and formal negotiated contracts, including those written through collective bargaining arrangements, an institution raises expectations and makes commitments to its various members, constituencies, and external publics. An institution also makes additional cultural and instructional commitments to its publics when it distributes information about programs designed to meet public needs or provide services to the wider community of which it is a part. At a time when institutions compete aggressively and openly for students and faculty and depend heavily upon public good will for funding, it is critical that pledges made to both internal constituencies and external publics be accurate representations of the institution's intentions and its capability to fulfill them.

☐ Pattern of Evidence Supporting This Criterion

The institutional self-study process, the Self-Study Report, and the Team Report need to explore a variety of issues. **In developing the pattern of evidence supporting Criterion Five, the Commission suggests the breadth of review that it considers appropriate to this criterion.**

a. student, faculty, and staff handbooks that describe various institutional relationships with those constituencies, including appropriate grievance procedures.

b. policies and practices for the resolution of internal disputes within the institution's constituency.

c. policies and practices consistent with its mission related to equity of treatment, nondiscrimination, affirmative action, and other means of enhancing access to education and the building of a diverse educational community.

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d. institutional publications, statements, and advertising that describe accurately and fairly the institution, its operations, and its programs.

e. relationships with other institutions of higher education conducted ethically and responsibly.

f. appropriate support for resources shared with other institutions.

g. policies and procedures regarding institutional relationships with and responsibility for intercollegiate athletics, student associations, and subsidiary or related business enterprises.

h. oversight processes for monitoring contractual arrangements with government, industry, and other organizations.

☐ Other Types of Evidence Appropriate for This Criterion

All institutions of higher education need to examine many of the same areas of practices and relationships when assessing institutional integrity. Most of those areas are captured in the language of this criterion and in the General Institutional Requirements. However, some institutions will confront situations unique to their state, their specific type of institution, or a particular program they offer. In those situations, additional types of evidence might be important to an institution's claim that it fulfills this criterion. Although the Commission looks to the appropriate national and regional athletic associations and conferences for the detailed supervision of intercollegiate programs, it expects institutions to evaluate their programs as part of the self-study process and to include that evaluation in the Self-Study Report.

Some examples:

◊ An institution is charged by state law to ensure that its board meetings are announced and open to the public. It should include an evaluation of how it fulfills this law.

◊ An institution must report to a denominational governing body. It might evaluate how it honors the terms of any agreement of denominational affiliation.

◊ An institution has a specific commitment to assist in local community development. It might evaluate the effectiveness of past, current, and planned relationships with civic and business groups and how it contributes to the economic, educational, and cultural advancement of the community.

◊ An institution specifically serves the needs of state and federal agencies (e.g., prison authorities, mental health authorities, military). It should include an evaluation of its faculty's and students' accomplishments in meeting these special contractual obligations, both to the agencies and to those served within them.

◊ A public or private institution has established a strong alumni or local foundation to gather and hold funds on behalf of the institution. The institution should carefully evaluate its formal relationship with that foundation, including its financial records and practices.

◊ An institution is known for its decentralization and educational entrepreneurialism. It should pay special attention to the accuracy of publications, statements, and advertising issued by the various units operating under the institution's name.

☐ Weighing Types of Evidence in Determining Whether This Criterion Is Met

Where written policies and procedures communicate an acceptance of ethical values not documented by an institution's actual practices and relationships, the Evaluation Team may feel obliged to weigh evidence of

actual practices and relationships more heavily than published policies and procedures. If an institution's actual practices are exemplary but its written policies and procedures are inadequate or out-of-date, the team may choose to weigh the practice over the policy. There are other situations in which types of evidence might be weighed differently.

Some examples:

- A large public institution has spent a number of years developing faculty and student handbooks that include exemplary systems of governance, administration, faculty self-regulation, and communications. However, the newly-elected governing board, responding to political pressures, has begun to intervene in curricular matters. The integrity of the institution might rest more with the ability of the board to understand and act on its appropriate roles than with the exemplary documents.

- A religious institution explicitly limits its faculty and/or student body to those who hold specific religious doctrines. The student newspaper has been closed down ostensibly because of lack of funding, but some claim it took editorial stands that violated religious doctrine. An evaluation of institutional policies and procedures and their application, as well as the adequacy of the communication regarding doctrinal orthodoxy, may figure prominently in the determination that this criterion is met.

- A private institution presents itself in all its advertising and recruiting brochures as a strong liberal arts college when in fact more than 75% of the students are enrolled in its three professional programs. Retention and student completion of degrees are remarkably high and have been for years. A careful evaluation might indicate that the apparent lack of fit between what the institution is and how it portrays itself should be remedied, and also show that there is little compelling evidence that the institution's integrity is in jeopardy.

- An institution is in the middle of an alleged scandal concerning several secret contracts between the institution and for-profit organizations owned by some members of the faculty and administration. The fact that the institution has and can document the use of carefully structured review processes by which all contracts—including these secret contracts—are reviewed might outweigh the issues of full disclosure in this situation.

Chapter Reference

The Criteria for Accreditation

An institution accredited by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools meets these Criteria for Accreditation.

Criterion One

"The institution has clear and publicly stated purposes consistent with its mission and appropriate to an institution of higher education."

In determining appropriate patterns of evidence for Criterion One, the Commission considers evidence such as:

a. long- and short-range institutional and educational goals.

b. processes, involving its constituencies, through which the institution evaluates its purposes.

c. decision-making processes that are appropriate to its stated mission and purposes.

d. understanding of the stated purposes by institutional constituencies.

e. efforts to keep the public informed of its institutional and educational goals through documents such as the catalog and program brochures.

f. support for freedom of inquiry for faculty and students.

g. institutional commitment to excellence in both the teaching provided by faculty and the learning expected of students.

Criterion Two

"The institution has effectively organized the human, financial, and physical resources necessary to accomplish its purposes."

In determining appropriate patterns of evidence for Criterion Two, the Commission considers evidence such as:

a. governance by a board consisting of informed people who understand their responsibilities, function in accordance with stated board policies, and have the resolve necessary to preserve the institution's integrity.

b. effective administration through well-defined and understood organizational structures, policies, and procedures.

c. qualified and experienced administrative personnel who oversee institutional activities and exercise appropriate responsibility for them.

d. systems of governance that provide dependable information to the institution's constituencies and, as appropriate, involve them in the decision-making processes.

Criterion Two continued...

e. faculty with educational credentials that testify to appropriate preparation for the courses they teach.

f. a sufficient number of students enrolled to meet the institution's stated educational purposes.

g. provision of services that afford all admitted students the opportunity to succeed.

h. a physical plant that supports effective teaching and learning.

i. conscientious efforts to provide students with a safe and healthy environment.

j. academic resources and equipment (e.g., libraries, electronic services and products, learning resource centers, laboratories and studios, computers) adequate to support the institution's purposes.

k. a pattern of financial expenditures that shows the commitment to provide both the environment and the human resources necessary for effective teaching and learning.

l. management of financial resources to maximize the institution's capability to meet its purposes.

Criterion Three

"The institution is accomplishing its educational and other purposes."

In determining appropriate patterns of evidence for Criterion Three, the Commission considers evidence such as:

a. educational programs appropriate to an institution of higher education.
   - courses of study in the academic programs that are clearly defined, coherent, and intellectually rigorous;
   - programs that include courses and/or activities whose purpose is to stimulate the examination and understanding of personal, social, and civic values;
   - programs that require of the faculty and students (as appropriate to the level of the educational program) the use of scholarship and/or the participation in research as part of the programs;
   - programs that require intellectual interaction between student and faculty and encourage it between student and student.

b. assessment of appropriate student academic achievement in all its programs, documenting:
   - proficiency in skills and competencies essential for all college-educated adults;
   - completion of an identifiable and coherent undergraduate level general education component; and
   - mastery of the level of knowledge appropriate to the degree granted.

c. graduate programs that:
   - distinguish clearly graduate from undergraduate offerings;
   - expect students and faculty to value and engage in research;
   - are approved, taught, and evaluated by a graduate faculty that possesses appropriate credentials and experience; and

Criterion Three continued...

- use results of regular internal and external peer review processes to ensure quality.

d. transcripts that follow commonly accepted practices and accurately reflect student learning.

e. effective teaching that characterizes its courses and academic programs.

f. ongoing support for professional development for faculty, staff, and administrators.

g. student services that effectively support the institution's purposes.

h. staff and faculty service that contributes to the institution's effectiveness.

i. if appropriate:
   - evidence of support for the stated commitment to basic and applied research through provision of sufficient human, financial, and physical resources to produce effective research;
   - evidence of support for the stated commitment to the fine and creative arts through provision of sufficient human, financial, and physical resources to produce creative endeavors and activities;
   - evidence of effective delivery of educational and other services to its community;
   - evidence of development and offering of effective courses and programs to meet the needs of its sponsoring organization and other special constituencies.

Criterion Four

"The institution can continue to accomplish its purposes and strengthen its educational effectiveness."

In determining appropriate patterns of evidence for Criterion Four, the Commission considers evidence such as:

a. a current resource base—financial, physical, and human—that positions the institution for the future.

b. decision-making processes with tested capability of responding effectively to anticipated and unanticipated challenges to the institution.

c. structured assessment processes that are continuous, that involve a variety of institutional constituencies, and that provide meaningful and useful information to the planning processes as well as to students, faculty, and administration.

d. plans as well as ongoing, effective planning processes necessary to the institution's continuance.

e. resources organized and allocated to support its plans for strengthening both the institution and its programs.

Criterion Five

"The institution demonstrates integrity in its practices and relationships."

In determining appropriate patterns of evidence for Criterion Five, the Commission considers evidence such as:

a. student, faculty, and staff handbooks that describe various institutional relationships with those constituencies, including appropriate grievance procedures.

b. policies and practices for the resolution of internal disputes within the institution's constituency.

c. policies and practices consistent with its mission related to equity of treatment, nondiscrimination, affirmative action, and other means of enhancing access to education and the building of a diverse educational community.

d. institutional publications, statements, and advertising that describe accurately and fairly the institution, its operations, and its programs.

e. relationships with other institutions of higher education conducted ethically and responsibly.

f. appropriate support for resources shared with other institutions.

g. policies and procedures regarding institutional relationships with and responsibility for intercollegiate athletics, student associations, and subsidiary or related business enterprises.

h. oversight processes for monitoring contractual arrangements with government, industry, and other organizations.

5 Institutional Evaluation for Improvement

THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS IN ACCREDITATION

The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education builds its comprehensive evaluations for initial and continued candidacy and accreditation on two foundations: **institutional self-study** and **peer evaluation.** An institution plans and undertakes a self-study process to determine how well it meets the Commission's Requirements and Criteria and to clarify its plans for improving and enhancing its programs and operations. The institution summarizes its findings in a Self-Study Report that both constitutes its formal application for initial or continued candidacy or accreditation and forms the basis for an evaluation visit conducted by a team of peers from other accredited higher education institutions. This chapter provides information on the self-study process and the Self-Study Report for all institutions. Specific information for institutions in the Candidacy Program appears in Chapter 13.

☐ Purposes of Self-Study in Accreditation

Insisting, as it has since the 1930s, that institutional accreditation be based on an institution's capacity for and success in fulfilling its mission, a mission that is appropriate to a higher education institution, the Commission requires from the institution sufficient evidence on which to make an accrediting decision. Nearly four decades ago, the Commission determined that institutional self-study best provided the evidence.

Recognizing that careful self-evaluation is crucial to any institution's effectiveness, the Commission continues to require periodic self-study as a major component of the accreditation process. The Commission requires that an institution formally examine itself, assess its strengths and challenges, and plan how to capitalize on those strengths and eliminate or alleviate those challenges. In the process, an institution documents its present effectiveness and its strategies to continue to improve that effectiveness.

☐ What the Commission Expects in Every Self-Study Process

For an effective self-study, an institution develops a process that will yield information it can use to improve. While the Commission does not prescribe the details of an individual institution's self-study process, it offers these clear expectations for every self-study process for candidacy or accreditation:

- **Begin with a Self-Study Plan.** A beneficial self-study process must serve both internal and external purposes. Foresight and thoughtful structuring of the self-study process, as documented in a Self-Study Plan, enable institutions to gain maximum benefits from the time and energy expended.
- **Focus on the whole institution.** The Commission does not accredit individual departments or programs; however, evaluating an institution in terms of the Commission's Criteria for Accreditation requires that each of the institution's component parts be examined. The information gathered through evaluation of each component contributes to an evaluation of the institution as a whole.
- **Permit wide involvement.** A Self-Study Report should speak for an entire institution, not for any single group within it. Therefore, it is important that the self-study process allow as wide an involvement as possible—from administrators, faculty, staff, students, alumni, and trustees.

Commission Evaluation Teams generally expect widespread awareness, across a campus, concerning the self-study process: that administrators, faculty, students, and staff know how and by whom the self-study was conducted; and that everyone had ample opportunity to contribute to the process and its results.

◇ **Build naturally on existing self-evaluation.** Every institution should already have ongoing programs for self-evaluation, for monitoring the effectiveness of its operations, and for planning. A self-study process should begin by incorporating and discussing what these existing evaluation programs have revealed. If the institution's existing approaches are inadequate, the self-study process should examine and improve them.

◇ **Evaluate rather than describe the institution.** To ensure an institution's continuing vitality and educational effectiveness, the self-study process must be analytical, self-critical. A descriptive Self-Study Report that merely inventories the institution's resources and operations fails to meet the Commission's expectations for its institutional evaluation process.

◇ **Identify clearly the institution's strengths and the areas that need improvement.** Whether the self-study confirms the adequacy of ongoing evaluation and planning or whether it suggests new priorities and strategies, institutional improvement is a major goal of the process. A candid appraisal of strengths, concerns, opportunities, and challenges allows an institution to develop explicit plans to build upon its strengths, ameliorate its weaknesses, and address its challenges.

◇ **Produce a Self-Study Report.** The self-study process for candidacy or accreditation can serve a variety of internal and external purposes. However, the self-study process must yield a Self-Study Report that reflects the process that led to it, and explicitly documents that the institution meets the Commission's General Institutional Requirements and Criteria for Accreditation and that it has instituted programs and mechanisms that will, over time, enhance its effectiveness.

☐ Preparing for and Conducting the Self-Study

For most affiliated institutions, preparation for self-study and Commission evaluation begins approximately two years before the evaluation visit, when the Executive Officer of the institution receives a reminder letter from the Commission. For an institution applying for initial affiliation (candidacy or accreditation), preparation begins when the Executive Director of the Commission advises the institution that the self-study process can commence.

An effective self-study process includes the following critical components:

■ Providing sound, knowledgeable leadership

◇ **Presidential leadership and support.** At its beginning, and throughout the self-study process, the Executive Officer's *visible* support is crucial. The more the Executive Officer makes it clear, both by word and action, that the self-study is an institutional priority, the greater the value and success of the process for the institution. To demonstrate the importance of the self-study to the institution, the Executive Officer should:

- ○ appoint a Self-Study Coordinator and the members of the Steering Committee and formally charge them with their task;
- ○ provide the Self-Study Coordinator with released time from teaching and/or other institutional duties;

  - give steering committee members the necessary support to carry out their charge, including clerical and secretarial assistance, computer(s), and space;
  - make certain the Steering Committee and working committees have access to the people and information necessary to do their jobs; and
  - insist that those who are called upon for this information are asked to make this a top priority.

- **An effective Self-Study Coordinator.** A Self-Study Coordinator is responsible for the overall direction and execution of the self-study and for the preparation of the Self-Study Report. The Self-Study Coordinator should command respect and confidence from across the institution and possess wide knowledge of institutional personnel, activities, and organizations. The Self-Study Coordinator ordinarily chairs the Self-Study Steering Committee and serves as a resource person to self-study work committees. Because writing and editing the Self-Study Report are usually major responsibilities, good human relations and communication skills are essential.

- **A strong Self-Study Steering Committee.** The primary tasks of the Steering Committee are to assist the Self-Study Coordinator to develop the Self-Study Plan, coordinate its implementation, and prepare the Self-Study Report. People chosen for the Steering Committee should be recognized leaders who can command the respect of the institution's various constituencies. They should be knowledgeable about the institution and enthusiastic about the self-study process, appreciating its critical importance to the institution. Steering Committee members should be open-minded enough to examine difficult or controversial issues fairly; they should possess the resolve to follow through on all work undertaken.

  Membership on the Steering Committee represents a serious commitment in time and energy. The institution's Executive Officer should make these appointments, in consultation with the Self-Study Coordinator, so that a broadly representative Steering Committee, including significant faculty involvement, can receive the cooperation necessary to carry out its task.

Using the Commission's materials and services

- **The Commission staff liaison.** The Commission staff liaison reviews the institution's Self-Study Plan and provides advice about integration of the institution's ongoing evaluation and planning programs with the self-study process for Commission evaluation. The staff liaison develops a proposed team for the evaluation visit and reviews the final draft of the institution's Self-Study Report. If the institution indicates that it would be useful, the staff liaison may visit the institution (at the Commission's expense) to help facilitate an effective self-study process.

- **Commission documents.** The Steering Committee will need to develop an understanding of the institution's affiliation with the Commission. Reviewing the last comprehensive Team Report and all subsequent Commission and/or staff actions is a good starting point. An institution may also find it useful to review its last Self-Study Report, recognizing, however, that significant changes in Commission policies and procedures may have made the substance and organization of older Self-Study Reports inappropriate models for the current process. The Executive Officer, Self-Study Coordinator, and Self-Study Steering Committee should have readily available the file of the institution's history with the Commission.

  The reminder letter sent to the institution's Executive Officer provides information about the scope of the evaluation or special issues that the Commission requires be covered. The Steering Committee also should review the accuracy of the institution's current Record of Status and Scope, particularly the Statement of Affiliation Status (SAS) section. (Chapter 2 explains the meaning and Commission use of this document.)

The institution should consult with its Commission staff liaison if it intends to request that its SAS be altered (e.g., to change the highest degree level or to modify a stipulation) or that the Commission permit it to effect a proposed change that requires prior approval (see the policies on institutional change in Chapter 12). The institution should seek clarification about how such requests for change may affect the self-study process and report.

◇ **The Annual Meeting.** The Commission's *Briefing* newsletter, one- and two-year reminder letters, and the special Annual Meeting announcement encourage institutions to send representatives to the Commission's Annual Meeting held in Chicago in early spring. Many Annual Meeting sessions provide guidance about effective self-study strategies, review Commission policies and procedures, and provide opportunities to examine sample Self-Study Reports and to exchange information and ideas with colleagues from other institutions engaged in self-study. Annual Meeting attendance is voluntary and open to all persons interested in self-study and institutional improvement. It is particularly useful for Self-Study Coordinators, Steering Committee members, executive officers, and trustees of institutions scheduled for evaluations in the next two or three years.

The Self-Study Coordinator and Steering Committee should be appointed early enough to permit the Coordinator and one or more committee members to attend the Annual Meeting at least two academic years before the evaluation visit is scheduled to occur.

◇ **Commission publications.** Read and distribute this *Handbook*. All those involved in the self-study process should be informed fully of the Commission's procedures and expectations. In particular, the Committee should study the General Institutional Requirements and the Criteria for Accreditation. The Self-Study Coordinator should consider subscribing to *Briefing*, to assure access by the Coordinator and the Steering Committee to the most up-to-date information. The Commission's Web site is another source of current information and resources.

■ Developing a Self-Study Plan

The Steering Committee's first major task is to plan a self-study process that both fits the needs of the institution and satisfies the requirements of the Commission. It is in designing a strategy for self-study that the institution can be most creative. The steps the Steering Committee should take to develop this Self-Study Plan, which is sometimes called the "prospective" or "design," are relatively straightforward:

◇ **Establish a self-study calendar and timetable that takes into account the conduct as well as the purpose of the self-study process.** It usually takes four or five full semesters for an institution to plan, execute, and report a comprehensive self-study process. When it receives the Commission's two-year reminder of a forthcoming comprehensive evaluation—if not before—the institution should begin to organize its self-study process. One of its first tasks is to establish a realistic timetable (see Chapter 10).

◇ **Identify institutional goals for the self-study process.** If certain constituencies within the institution expect the process to accomplish certain ends, these expectations should be made explicit and incorporated into the Steering Committee's plans. If the institution hopes to accomplish specific objectives through the process, those objectives should figure prominently in the Self-Study Plan. Self-study is an opportunity for an institution to tackle the challenges that confront it and to place upon the table issues that might otherwise go unaddressed. Usually this process begins with the Executive Officer and other administrators, but it can profitably include involvement from throughout the institution.

- ◇ **Determine how the General Institutional Requirements and the Criteria for Accreditation will be addressed in the self-study process and Report.** Because the Criteria cut across functional areas of an institution, one significant task in developing the Self-Study Plan is to plot clearly how an evaluation of the functions, operations, and educational programs of the institution will provide evidence that the Criteria for Accreditation are met. Typically, this is addressed through the proposed table of contents or outline for the Self-Study Report.

- ◇ **Identify how the institution will report and respond to concerns expressed by previous NCA teams.** The institution, in its Self-Study Report, needs to address the major concerns identified by the last comprehensive evaluation team (and all subsequent Commission reviews). The current team will have received all of these documents and will want to see evidence of how the institution has changed as a result of its relationship with the Commission.

- ◇ **Include a preliminary outline of the Self-Study Report.**

Approximately 21–29 months before the comprehensive visit, the institution completes its Self-Study Plan and submits it to its Commission staff liaison for comment and advice. Staff liaisons welcome early receipt of plans from institutions to provide the maximum assistance in the early stages of self-study.

■ Conducting an effective self-study process

The Steering Committee should weigh carefully the time, energy, and commitment the self-study process will require, both from its own members and from all the constituencies whose involvement will be crucial.

- ◇ **Use appropriate committee structures.** A self-study process need not be constructed from scratch, nor need it involve a new layer of committees. The Steering Committee should decide how best to integrate the structures for self-study with any committee structures already in place. It can divide aspects of each subject among its committees, or it can assign one committee to "take the lead" on a particular subject, allowing other groups to feed relevant analysis and evaluation to the designated committee. An institution needs to involve people familiar with the subjects of their scrutiny in its committees. It must also make clear which committees have responsibility for which assignments.

- ◇ **Use existing evaluation and planning processes and materials before structuring new ones.** One task of the self-study is to gather information. Often, it is not as critical to create new data as it is to update, analyze, integrate, and draw meaning from information that already exists. Possible sources of self-study information include: ongoing institutional evaluation, planning, and budgeting processes; reports to system and/or state authorities; program outcomes data, particularly among occupational, vocational, and professional programs; self-study and accreditation reports concerning programs accredited by specialized accrediting agencies; local and regional data on population, employment, economic activity (available from city and county planning agencies, school districts, the census, public utilities, and business and professional organizations).

  Increasingly, institutions develop internal evaluation processes to inform decision-making. Rather than duplicate work that is already being done, the Steering Committee should inventory, update, and use the information gained through these other evaluation and planning processes in its self-study.

- ◇ **Establish and maintain regular communication links with institutional constituencies.** While it is neither necessary nor desirable that everyone in the institution be on a committee, the Steering Committee needs to establish means of informing all the institution's constituencies of preliminary findings and developments throughout the self-study process. It should encourage their responses and use those responses to revise and refine the materials. Finally, it should disseminate the Self-Study Report.

Communication is not simply a matter of letting the total community know the progress of the process; it includes the establishment of clear and unambiguous reporting mechanisms and writing responsibilities that will lead from data-gathering to the completed Self-Study Report. Communication also involves informing constituencies of evaluation methodologies for various aspects of the institution. This will help ensure that appropriate data are gathered and that those who are called upon for data understand how it will be analyzed.

◇ **Conduct a self-study appropriate to the institution.** The ways in which the self-study process is conducted will vary according to the size, complexity, and character of the institution. No single pattern is appropriate to all institutions. A variety of techniques may be valuable for gathering additional information and opinion, including surveys (of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members), interviews (conducted both by telephone and in person), focused group interviews, mail-in student newspaper "identify an issue" forums, and open meetings or hearings. In gathering opinion, the self-study should strive to allow all institutional constituencies to register their points of view.

THE SELF-STUDY REPORT

☐ The Purposes of the Self-Study Report

An institution's Self-Study Report plays specific roles in the Commission's processes.

◇ It constitutes the institution's formal request for initial or continued accreditation.

◇ It summarizes the purposes and findings of the self-study process.

◇ It demonstrates the institution's ability to analyze its effectiveness and develop plans for its own improvement.

◇ It provides evidence that the institution fulfills the Commission's General Institutional Requirements and the Criteria for Accreditation.

◇ It succinctly summarizes the information necessary for the evaluation visit, the review process, and Commission action.

☐ The Audiences for the Self-Study Report

The self-study process requires an investment of money, time, and energy. To maximize the benefits of this investment, an institution should consider using the self-study as a vehicle for communicating to important internal and external audiences. Before it begins, an institution is wise to identify those who will benefit most from involvement and to envision specific prospective audiences for its Self-Study Report. Primary audiences for the report are the Commission representatives involved in the evaluation-accreditation process: the Commission staff liaison, the Evaluation Team, the Readers and/or Review Committee members, and the Commissioners. In addition, an institution should consider the impact and possible uses of the self-study process, interim reports, and final Self-Study Report on the following audiences: institutional personnel (administrators, faculty, staff); members of the institution's governing board; students, both current and prospective; parents of students; graduates; members of the community (or communities) the institution serves; members of institutional advisory committees; state regulatory agencies; national higher education organizations; and specialized accrediting agencies.

☐ The Structure of the Self-Study Report

The Self-Study Report should be:

- a well-written, readable narrative, not a collection of tables, charts, and graphs;
- concise yet thorough;
- evaluative rather than descriptive;
- written with the other materials to which its readers will have access in mind. Since the Self-Study Report is part of a set of materials, which includes Basic Institutional Data Forms, externally-audited financial statements, faculty and student handbooks, and the catalog, it need not repeat information that its readers will find elsewhere.

There is no single way to organize the Self-Study Report. Each institution is encouraged to present its report in the manner best suited to its own purposes and needs, flowing from its Self-Study Plan and process. While there are various ways to structure the Self-Study Report, its uses in the Commission's evaluation process require that every report contain four essential elements:

- the table of contents;
- the introduction that provides the context for the evaluation and addresses the concerns expressed by previous Commission teams;
- the body of the report that, regardless of how it is organized, includes an evaluation of the institution in terms of the Criteria for Accreditation;
- the summary, in which the institution makes its request for the affiliation status sought, including any changes.

- **Table of contents.** However it is organized, the Self-Study Report should be preceded by a Table of Contents to assist readers.

- **The introduction.** This element of the Self-Study Report is clear, concise, and provides information to give the reader a context within which to read what follows. This introduction should include:
  - A brief profile of the institution, including special qualities and distinctive programs.
  - A summary of the institution's accreditation history.
  - The purposes of and audience(s) for the report. Each purpose should be specified. Although one purpose undoubtedly will be to gain or continue accreditation, there should be others as well. The intended audiences should be identified.
  - The organization of the report. This should help the reader find the discussion of basic components of the institution in the report.
  - Review of the self-study process. This helps readers of the Self-Study Report understand how various organizational components were reviewed.

- ◊ The institution's response to the most recent NCA Team Report. The Evaluation Team receives copies of the most recent comprehensive Team Report and its formal Institutional Response, copies of subsequent focused reports and responses, staff analyses of any required reports, Assessment Plan Review reports, and information about other changes approved by the Commission. Therefore, the institution should comment on where and how the current Self-Study Report will treat concerns identified by previous Commission reviews.
- ◊ Changes and/or significant developments since the most recent comprehensive evaluation.

- **The body of the Self-Study Report.** The body of the Self-Study Report may be organized in a variety of ways, but it must include an explicit evaluation of the institution in terms of the Commission's Criteria for Accreditation. Some institutions structure their Self-Study Reports around the Criteria. Others organize their reports around functional topics with a concluding chapter in which each criterion is explicitly mentioned together with an analysis of where and how the body of the report substantiates the claim that the criterion is fulfilled. Some institutions structure a self-study process around special emphases; their Self-Study Reports emphasize those topics but include evidence that the Criteria are met.

Self-study should not stop with description; it must go on to interpret the meaning of the things described. Both the self-study process and the Self-Study Report should stress analysis and evaluation. Information is, of course, essential both to stimulate serious introspection and to provide an accurate picture of the institution to the NCA Evaluation Team. It is critical, however, that the presentation of information be accompanied by the institution's interpretation of its significance.

An example:

A particular set of facts (e.g., the number/types of library holdings) is not particularly useful unless the team also knows:

- ◊ the institution's evaluation of these facts (e.g., whether and on what basis the institution believes its collection is exemplary, average, or inadequate);
- ◊ the reasons for and evidence behind this belief (e.g., evidence that students' use of the collection is or is not appropriate for their level and type of studies); and
- ◊ the actions the institution plans to take as a result of its analysis (e.g., encourage greater library use).

Many Self-Study Report writers find it difficult to determine how much descriptive content to provide. People at every institution believe theirs is unique, and that outsiders will not be able to understand or appreciate it without a full context. Often they write pages of descriptive "background," but neglect self-appraisal or their analysis regarding self-improvement. Lengthy, descriptive reports may weaken the team's ability to do its job of evaluating the institution.

Institutions should make every effort to limit description to the minimum a team of informed peers needs to understand the context of the self-analysis, challenges, and recommendations. A good Self-Study Report introduces an issue by outlining its background concisely, presents conclusion(s) the institution drew from its study of the issue, explains upon which evidence that conclusion rests, and discusses the implications of the evaluation for the institution's future. It is not sufficient to refer to data. Because the meaning is not always self-evident, the data need to be interpreted.

One way to provide both description and evaluation is to structure the Self-Study Report so that it promotes analysis. The conclusion of the Self-Study Report (and of each chapter, if possible) consists, in part, of specific recommendations: for action, for change, for further study, or for collecting additional information. An institution also should include problems identified by the self-study process but addressed before the arrival of the Evaluation Team.

Identifying specific recommendations gives focus to the work of each committee during the self-study process. It forces everyone to discriminate between minor problems and major concerns. Ultimately, the Self-Study Report should identify institutional priorities among all of these recommendations.

Inviting self-study committees to identify challenges and suggest remedies should be built into the institution's decision-making structure. As part of the formal self-study process the Steering Committee or some other new or existing group needs to be charged by the Executive Officer, after the Evaluation Team leaves, to track the recommendations the self-study has produced; the recommendations need to be assigned formally to those individuals and groups in the institution whose job it is to deal with the areas concerned. This is not to suggest that any institution will necessarily adopt all recommendations its self-study process produces, merely that there must be a mechanism to guarantee that serious administrative and faculty consideration of each recommendation takes place. Explaining why a particular recommendation is unworkable will often satisfy those who devised it almost as much as adopting it would have. At the least, those who devised the recommendations will know their concern received attention. Without some provision to ensure that this follow-through occurs, Self-Study Steering Committee members are less likely to take their work seriously or will take their work seriously and become frustrated and angry when they see their suggestions shelved and ignored.

- **The summary.** The summary section of the Self-Study Report requests the status sought, justifying any changes in the institution's Statement of Affiliation Status or in its relationship with the Commission that require prior approval (see Chapter 12). The institution's rationale for each request should be a summary argument, supported by specific references to the discussion that appears in the body of the Self-Study Report. The summary need not repeat what has already been presented or discussed elsewhere, but needs to pull together the institution's contention that it merits accreditation under the conditions it thinks appropriate.

If the report is organized around the five Criteria, with a chapter (or more) for each, there may be a summary at the end of each chapter (or group of chapters) arguing that the institution meets that particular criterion. However, if the report is organized in some other way (e.g., around institutional units or function or around issues) it is essential that this final section presents a summary of evidence that the institution fulfills each of the five Criteria.

☐ The General Institutional Requirements in the Self-Study Report

In addition to the Criteria, the Self-Study Report must provide explicit assurance to the Commission that the institution meets the General Institutional Requirements (GIRs). Since the GIRs are "threshold" requirements for both candidacy and accreditation and the Criteria establish a higher level of expectation, it may be convenient to refer to the discussion of the appropriate Criterion when treating a particular GIR.

It is important that the discussion of each Requirement include reference to substantiating documentation, whether that is provided within the Self-Study Report, the catalog and handbooks, or in the Evaluation Team's Resource Room on the campus.

Institutions seeking candidacy or initial accreditation should devote one full chapter of the Self-Study Report to the GIRs, placing it after the introductory section of the report. In evaluations for continued accreditation, this discussion of GIRs may be placed in an appendix or as a chapter in the body of the report.

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OTHER MATERIALS REQUIRED FOR THE EVALUATION

☐ Materials Sent to the Evaluation Team and the Commission Staff Liaison

An institution should send every member of the Evaluation Team the following items six to eight weeks prior to the date the evaluation visit begins. One set should also be sent to the Commission staff liaison.

- ◇ **Self-Study Report**
- ◇ **Basic Institutional Data Forms.** Each institution is required to complete a set of Basic Institutional Data Forms. These forms, which are sent to the institution by the Commission, ask for certain kinds of quantitative information to assist the Evaluation Team in its qualitative evaluation. The forms may be bound into the Self-Study Report as an appendix or may be submitted with the report as a separate document. Information should not differ significantly from that reported in the Self-Study Report. Where differences occur, a note of explanation on the form is needed.
- ◇ Audited Financial Statements for the two most recently-completed fiscal years
- ◇ current copies of all **institutional catalogs** or course bulletins
- ◇ copies of the **faculty, staff, and student handbooks**

Other helpful documents to include in the mailing are a list of the materials that will be available in the team resource room on campus and a campus map.

The institution is advised not to overload the team members with materials in this mailing. The team members need to focus on the Self-Study Report and primary supporting materials. In addition, excessive paper is difficult to transport. Supplementary materials are best placed in the team resource room on campus.

☐ Materials Available to the Evaluation Team on Campus

These materials should be readily available to the Evaluation Team during the visit (most, if not all, in a Resource Room provided for the team).

- ◇ minutes of major institutional committees, including Self-Study Committee
- ◇ reports referenced in the Self-Study Report or used by working committees
- ◇ policies and procedures related to curriculum adoption, review, and evaluation
- ◇ policies on learning resources, including libraries, and formal agreements for the shared use of learning resources
- ◇ policies on interaction with other academic institutions and programs
- ◇ policies for allocation and use of computer resources
- ◇ budgets and expenditure reports for units, programs, and the institution as a whole, and the institutional audits, at least for the prior five years
- ◇ physical facilities master plan
- ◇ maintenance plans

- ◇ catalogs, bulletins, viewbooks, and other institutional promotional literature
- ◇ academic admission, good standing, and completion policies
- ◇ policies related to the employment, orientation, supervision, and evaluation of full-time faculty, part-time faculty, and teaching assistants
- ◇ faculty, student, and staff handbooks
- ◇ bylaws of faculty and staff assemblies or other representative bodies
- ◇ governance documents: charter, bylaws, policies, membership, minutes, reports
- ◇ a complete roster of faculty members (full- and part-time) and their teaching assignments during the current academic term
- ◇ formal agreements for all consortia or contractual relationships
- ◇ student service policies (residence, governance, health, financial aid, student records) and the refund policy
- ◇ board rosters, charters, and bylaws, including those of separately incorporated entities (e.g., research, development, foundation, alumni associations, or athletic corporations)
- ◇ reports from other agencies or accrediting bodies
- ◇ documents concerning Title III compliance and recertification (see Chapter 14)
- ◇ third party comment notices (see p. 83)

THE SPECIAL EMPHASES SELF-STUDY OPTION

☐ Purpose of the Special Emphases Option

A "special emphases" self-study is an option for accredited, established, well-functioning institutions that are willing to commit serious attention to a select group of critical issues in order to contribute to institutional improvement and educational excellence. Regular comprehensive evaluations have many benefits, yet a special emphases self-study should be made only after careful consideration. A comprehensive evaluation is an excellent opportunity for an institution to submit for examination major issues without singling out specific programs, departments, or issues. A comprehensive evaluation often invites wider involvement from institutional constituencies. However, the accreditation process is revitalized for some institutions when they seize this opportunity to build their self-study processes around a small number of carefully selected critical areas in which they want to improve or excel.

☐ Determining Whether an Institution Should Do a Special Emphases Self-Study

To exercise the special emphases option, an institution

- ◇ will have been accredited for several years, including at least one decennial cycle between comprehensive evaluations;

- demonstrates that it has adequately developed programs of evaluation and institutional research to provide the appropriate data to support the institution's claim that it meets the Criteria for Accreditation;
- submits documentation that confirms that there is a strong consensus among various institutional constituencies that the areas of emphasis are appropriate, timely, and are among the most critical issues confronting the institution;
- provides a Self-Study Plan that shows that the work on the areas of emphasis will engage a significant portion of the institution's constituencies; and
- testifies to the institution's commitment to respond speedily and positively to the recommendations that result from studying the areas of emphasis and its willingness to be judged in part on its utilization of the results of its special emphases self-study.

Staff Approval of the Special Emphases Self-Study

A Steering Committee contemplating a self-study process built around a limited number of special emphases should contact its Commission staff liaison early in the planning process. The institution must submit a Self-Study Plan explaining the selected areas of emphasis, how it will study these in depth, and how it will demonstrate it continues to meet the GIRs and Criteria. The Commission staff must review and agree with the appropriateness of the special emphases option for the institution. The staff then develops a letter or memorandum that outlines the Commission's acceptance of the special emphases. Those documents accompany Evaluation Team invitations and all Commission materials used throughout the evaluation process.

Selecting the Areas of Emphasis

The special emphases self-study process may be an opportunity to reconsider and revise the institution's mission; to study enrollment trends; to initiate a more complex system of assessing student outcomes; to assess the impact of a new governance system; to work on a long-range plan; to evaluate and revise such a plan. Some additional possibilities might include assessment, community service, cultural diversity, general education, graduate education, undergraduate education, information technology, research, strategic planning, and student development. A special emphases self-study should lead to concrete change in the areas covered. By the very nature of this self-study process, proposals emerging from the self-study will need to have the full attention of the administration.

The Special Emphases Self-Study Report

Like comprehensive Self-Study Reports, the special emphases Self-Study Report includes a table of contents, an introduction, a body, and a summary. In addition to what is normally included in regular Self-Study Reports, the Introduction provides the reasons for which the institution undertook a special emphases self-study. The first section of the body of the report provides solid evidence that the GIRs and Criteria are met. Much of this evidence can be provided by interpreting readily available institutional data. Following this, each special emphasis should then be treated, in appropriate depth, in its own section of the body of the report. Finally, the summary should present the institution's argument that it deserves continued accreditation because it satisfies the Criteria and GIRs and because it used the special emphases self-study as an effective means to further institutional improvement.

☐ Special Emphases Evaluation Teams

When it visits the institution, the Evaluation Team will expect that major institutional groups (beginning with the CEO) recognize the importance of the areas of emphasis and have a stake in the outcomes achieved by the self-study. It will expect that the vast majority of those the Evaluation Team interviews had been involved directly in the examination of the areas of emphasis or have a clear sense that they had the opportunity to offer input into the examination process. In addition, the team should anticipate that most critical issues facing the institution will be included in the areas of emphasis—that there will be no unexpected major problems that the self-study failed to confront. Since the institution has committed itself to action by undertaking a special emphases self-study, the team may recommend more monitoring (especially in the form of progress reports) than would be the case in a regular comprehensive evaluation.

Commission staff nominates the members of the Evaluation Team according to the special emphases identified in the written proposal. An Evaluation Team for a special emphases visit may be slightly larger than a team for a regular comprehensive evaluation visit.

☐ A Note about Other Options for the Evaluation Process

In August 1997, the Commission approved experimentation with the evaluation processes for comprehensive visits. Convinced that through experimentation it can learn important lessons about how to make accreditation processes responsive to institutional needs, the Commission encouraged the staff to respond positively and creatively to proposals that come from our member institutions.

The Commission agreed that the following understandings will inform this experimentation:

- ◇ Experiment only with strong institutions in low-risk situations.
- ◇ A Memorandum of Understanding, signed by the institutional CEO, the Commission staff liaison, and the Executive Director, will outline all of the unique aspects of an experiment. It will be an integral part of all of the processes, sent to teams, to ARC members, and to the Commission.
- ◇ Special training/orientation will be provided to the teams involved in these experiments to ensure that they can fulfill the expectations placed on them.
- ◇ A formal evaluation of the process will be integral to each experiment.
- ◇ The experiment will do the institutions no harm; the Commission will ensure that Consultant-Evaluators are held harmless.
- ◇ The fee structure should cover actual team costs and an administrative fee.

An institution interested in developing and conducting an experimental process should collaborate with its staff liaison early in its preparations.

SEEKING THIRD PARTY COMMENT

☐ History and Purpose of the Commission Policy

The Commission has had a longstanding commitment to making the accreditation process more visible to the public and to broadening public participation in that process. In 1992 Congress amended the Higher Education

Act and authorized the Secretary of Education to promulgate new regulations for accrediting agencies. These new regulations require agencies recognized by the Secretary to publish the year when institutions will next be evaluated and to provide an "opportunity for third party comment, either in writing or at a public hearing, at the agency's discretion, concerning the institution's...qualifications for accreditation or preaccreditation." 34 C.F.R. § 602.27(d) (1996).

In response to the new Federal regulation the Commission began to study various ways to bring public comment into the comprehensive visit process. The Commission's goal was to design a process that would in fact reach the various public constituencies important to institutions and provide a meaningful role for those comments within the accrediting process. In August of 1996 the Commission adopted the following policy on "Public Notification of Comprehensive Evaluation Visit":

> The Commission seeks comments from third parties about institutions being evaluated for accreditation or candidacy. Institutions scheduled for comprehensive evaluations publicize the forthcoming evaluation in accordance with established Commission procedures regarding content, dissemination, and timing. The Commission publishes the names of institutions scheduled for evaluation through appropriate Commission vehicles.

The new policy requires a public comments process for those institutions undergoing a **comprehensive evaluation only.** The policy gives responsibility to both the institution and the Commission in getting important information about the evaluation visit to various publics and soliciting comments from those publics in response to that information. It does not require a public hearing.

☐ The Institution's Role in Publicizing a Forthcoming Evaluation

- **Identifying the public.** The Commission asks every institution before beginning the third party comment process to identify its public constituencies. In determining its public constituencies, an institution will typically want to consider its relationship with groups such as:

  - ◇ students—prospective, current, and former students/alumni;
  - ◇ financial supporters—taxpayers, parents, general donors, churches, denominations;
  - ◇ the local community—local government, civic groups, religious community, neighbors, area businesses, elementary/secondary schools, other postsecondary institutions;
  - ◇ the state or national community—state government, sponsoring corporations;
  - ◇ others—contractual partners, employers of graduates, parties to articulation agreements, etc.

  No doubt every institution will identify different groups as its constituencies. However, every institution should be able to demonstrate to an evaluation team that it has given careful thought to identifying the constituencies to be informed about the opportunity to participate in third party comment.

- **Disseminating information.** Once the institution has identified its constituencies it will choose a method(s) of disseminating information about the visit to them. In many cases, a local newspaper will be the most appropriate vehicle for reaching a broad segment of the institution's publics. A note in the alumni magazine may reach a variety of constituencies, including alumni, donors, area employers, civic groups, parents, etc., who may not necessarily read the local newspaper. The campus newspaper may be the best vehicle for reaching local businesses near campus and current students, but clearly will not reach all of the institution's publics. An institution may also want to consider the suitability of its Web site for reaching some of its constituencies. An institution will probably need to utilize more than one publication vehicle in order to ensure that it reaches multiple constituencies. Institutions should consult Commission staff if they have any questions about the appropriateness of their choices for soliciting third party comment.

An effective public notice campaign need not be costly or elaborate. In certain cases, publications may, as a community service, print a press release about the visit at little or no charge to the institution. Where the institution must pay for space in publications to ensure that notice will appear at the appropriate time, the Commission encourages institutions to consider cost-effective and creative placement of notification within publications. It is not necessary that institutions take out large, expensive ads in the front section of newspapers. Institutions should attempt to make the notice as visible as possible to the public. But institutions are free to explore the availability of a larger ad in more moderately priced space in the publication, or even in the classified section, or of advertising on certain days when rates might be lower. The institution may also want to consider placing notice of the visit in tandem with its regular advertising in the Sunday supplement or other location.

The Commission does not prescribe the choice of publications nor the size or placement of notice, nor does it require that the institution ensure that it has reached *every* constituency with information about the visit. The institution should be able to demonstrate to the evaluation team that it has given careful thought to appropriate vehicles for reaching its constituencies and has selected one or more vehicles that are likely to reach a broad cross-section of the institution's publics.

- **Content of the notice.** The notice is to include these elements:
    - the purpose(s) of the forthcoming visit;
    - the dates of the visit;
    - the institution's current accreditation status with the Commission;
    - an invitation to the public to send comments directly to the Commission that includes the Commission's address and the date by which comments must be received (no later than one month before the visit and notification that all comments must be in writing and signed).

  See Chapter Reference for sample press release and ad formats.

- **Timing of the notice.** The notice(s) should appear at least three-four months before the comprehensive visit. The institution also sends a photocopy of the printed notice(s) to the Commission office. The institution should keep copies of the notice(s), and the publications in which they appeared, in their files and place these materials in the team resource room during the visit.

☐ The Commission's Role in Publicizing Forthcoming Evaluations

- **Distribution of notification.** The Commission will publish the names of those institutions scheduled for a comprehensive evaluation in its *Briefing* newsletter. Although the *Briefing* will typically be the primary vehicle for information to its public, the Commission may also use other means as well. The Commission may disseminate the list of institutions with letters or announcements sent to specific groups, such as state agencies. The Commission also posts visit information on its Web site. See Chapter Reference A for a sample of the Commission notification.

- **The role of the Commission office.** The Commission office receives all third party comments. Comments that are not in writing will not be considered. Unsigned or anonymous comments will not be considered. The Commission office will forward the written, signed comments it receives to the institution.

However, the Commission will not forward comments that may be defamatory, in restraint of trade, or addressed to matters not relevant to the accreditation or preaccreditation status of the institution. In addition, if the Commission receives third party comments concerning unresolved matters pending in other forums, such as federal or state court or administrative agencies, it will forward those comments to the team only if they address matters relevant to the accreditation or preaccreditation status of the institution. The parties should understand, however, that neither the Commission nor the team will resolve or comment upon any factual or legal issues pending in that case specifically.

Individuals who allege an injury from an action of an institution or who have a personal dispute with an institution should request the separate Policy on Complaints document from the Commission office. They should utilize the process described therein for sending material about the injury or dispute to the Commission. If the Commission receives such material as public comment, it will process the material as a complaint.

The Commission typically forwards the written, signed comments to the team without explanation. However, in some special circumstances, staff may provide explanatory comments to assist the team.

☐ The Evaluation Team's Role in the Third Party Comment Process

Approximately two weeks before the visit the team will receive from the Commission office copies of the written, signed comments that meet the screening criteria noted in the previous section. The Chief Executive Officer of the institution will receive copies of all comments sent to the team.

Typically the team will want to take some time during the course of the visit to discuss the third party comment process with the institution and review the copies of the notice(s). The team will first determine whether the institution has made a good faith effort to identify its constituencies and select appropriate places for notice addressing those constituencies about third party comment. Next the team will want to review the comments with the institution and determine what consideration it plans to give to those comments as it works in the future with its various constituencies. Finally, the team will want to determine whether any of the issues raised in the comments are relevant to the institution's ability to meet the General Institutional Requirements or Criteria for Accreditation or suggestive of a need for further monitoring by the Commission. Typically the comments will form only a basis for further inquiry of appropriate issues by the team. Any decisions made by the team should rest on evidence gained from the visit itself.

Within the Team Report the team will provide an analysis of the appropriateness and effectiveness of the institution's methods in reaching its publics. Teams need only provide a few sentences within the team report commenting on this process. In most cases this information is all the team need provide in the report concerning third party comment. If the institution has indicated a willingness to consider the comments as it works with its constituencies in the future, and the visit raised no other issues of concern relative to those comments, the team's inquiry should be satisfied.

If the team identified serious areas of concern in the third party comment relevant to the institution's ability to meet the General Institutional Requirements and the Criteria for Accreditation or that suggested a need for further monitoring, the team will want to address those comments and its follow-up inquiry in more detail. The team should be able to identify the evidence in the Self-Study or from the visit process that confirmed these areas as indeed suggestive of concern. No team should rest a requirement for monitoring or a decision on status solely on third party comment.

The team's conclusions about third party comment will be part of the Team Report, which is part of the institution's permanent file and is sent to the next evaluation team. The third party comments themselves will not become a part of the permanent file of the official relationship of the institution with the Commission. They will be stored and microfilmed with the self-study and other important documents that are used in the evaluation process.

The institution may, if it wishes, respond to the third party comment process at the time it responds to the Team Report. The institution's response to the Team Report also becomes a part of the permanent file and is sent to the next evaluation team.

Chapter Reference

Third Party Comment: Sample Documents

Institutional Checklist

Preparing for Third Party Comment

- ☐ Identify public constituencies.
- ☐ Select appropriate vehicle(s) for placement of notice.
- ☐ Put together public disclosure notice(s).
- ☐ Publish notice(s) (at least three-four months before the visit).
- ☐ Forward copies of the notice(s) to the Commission Research Associate, who is coordinating the third party comment process, as soon as the notices are published (no later than two months before the visit).
- ☐ Place copies of the publications in which notice appeared in the team resource room.
- ☐ Review written comments forwarded to the institution and the team (typically two weeks before the visit).
- ☐ Be prepared to discuss the third party comment process with the evaluation team.

Institutional Public Notices

Sample public notices of a forthcoming visit are shown on the following page. The institution is not required to use these examples, but may choose to write its own announcement **as long as it includes**

- ◇ the purpose(s) of the forthcoming visit;
- ◇ the dates of the visit;
- ◇ the institution's current accreditation status with the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education;
- ◇ an invitation to the public to send comments directly to the Commission. The invitation should include the Commission's address and the date by which comments must be received (no later than one month before the visit and notification that all comments must be in writing and signed).

SAMPLE INSTITUTIONAL PRESS RELEASE

John Dewey College will undergo a comprehensive evaluation visit May 3-5, 1996, by a team representing the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. John Dewey College has been accredited by the Commission since 1967. Its accreditation is at the Master's degree level and includes degree sites at various other locations within the state.

The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education is one of six accrediting agencies in the United States that provide institutional accreditation on a regional basis. Institutional accreditation evaluates an entire institution and accredits it as a whole. Other agencies provide accreditation for specific programs. Accreditation is voluntary. The Commission accredits approximately 950 institutions of higher education in a nineteen-state region. The Commission is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

For the past year and half, John Dewey College has been engaged in a process of self-study, addressing the Commission's requirements and criteria for accreditation. The evaluation team will visit the institution to gather evidence that the self-study is thorough and accurate. The team will recommend to the Commission a continuing status for the college; following a review process, the Commission itself will take the final action.

The public is invited to submit comments regarding the college:

Public Comment on (insert name of college)
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
30 North LaSalle Street, Suite 2400
Chicago, IL 60602

Comments must address substantive matters related to the quality of the institution or its academic programs. Written, signed comments must be received by April 3, 1996. The Commission cannot guarantee that comments received after the due date will be considered. Comments should include the name, address, and telephone number of the person providing the comments. Comments will not be treated as confidential.

Note: Individuals with a specific dispute or grievance with an institution should request the separate Policy on Complaints document from the Commission office. The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education cannot settle disputes between institutions and individuals. Complaints will not be considered third party comment.

SAMPLE INSTITUTIONAL ADVERTISEMENT

John Dewey College is seeking comments from the public about the College in preparation for its periodic evaluation by its regional accrediting agency. The College will undergo a comprehensive evaluation visit May 3-5, 1996, by a team representing the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. John Dewey College has been accredited by the Commission since 1967. The team will review the institution's ongoing ability to meet the Commission's Criteria for Accreditation and General Institutional Requirements.

The public is invited to submit comments regarding the college:

Public Comment on (insert name of college)
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
30 North LaSalle Street, Suite 2400
Chicago, IL 60602

Comments must address substantive matters related to the quality of the institution or its academic programs. Comments must be in writing and signed; comments cannot be treated as confidential.

All comments must be received by April 3, 1996

Sample Commission Notification

COMMISSION INVITES THIRD-PARTY COMMENT

The Federal regulations implementing the 1992 Higher Education Act Amendments require that accrediting agencies allow for public comment on the qualifications of those institutions under consideration for preaccreditation or accreditation. The Commission invites interested parties to submit written, signed comments on those institutions listed below that are scheduled for team visits in 1997-98.

Comments should be sent to:

Public Comment on (insert name of college)
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
30 North LaSalle Street, Suite 2400
Chicago, IL 60602

Comments on these institutions are due in the Commission office **no later than one month before the date the visit is scheduled to begin.** The Commission cannot guarantee that comments received after the due date will be considered. Comments should include the name and address of the person(s) providing the comments.

Note: Individuals with a specific dispute or grievance with an institution should request the separate "Policy on Complaints" document from the Commission office. The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education cannot settle disputes between institutions and individuals, whether those are faculty, students, or others. Complaints will not be considered third party comment.

This list is accurate as of the date of this mailing. Check the Commission Web site www.ncacihe.org for updates to the schedule of visits.

Evaluations for (TYPE OF EVALUATION) .... visit begins
(state)
(name of institution) .... date of visit

6

Peer Review as a Form of Evaluation and Self-Regulation

PEER REVIEW IN THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The effectiveness of peer review as a viable process for self-regulation in higher education depends heavily on the qualities of those who participate in it. At every step in the accreditation process educators from throughout the North Central region contribute their time and expertise to render the judgments and establish the policies that embody the Commission's primary purposes: institutional improvement and public certification of institutional quality.

The members of what the Commission calls its Consultant-Evaluator Corps serve in many roles. Consultant-Evaluators (C-Es) make each level of the Commission's evaluation process an exercise in peer review.

- As members of comprehensive or focused **Evaluation Teams** or of **Evaluators' Panels,** they examine institutional effectiveness, provide advice and counsel for institutional improvement, and recommend accrediting actions to the Commission;
- As members of the **Accreditation Review Council,** they participate in the review processes of the Commission, serving as members of Review Committees and as readers in the Readers' Process, steps in the evaluation process that follow the team visit;
- As Commissioners serving on the 15-person **Commission,** they have responsibility for decisions about the affiliation of institutions, for the formulation of Commission policies, and for the oversight of Commission operations.

THE CONSULTANT-EVALUATOR CORPS

Drawn from large institutions and small, from long-established ones and new; from private and public, church-related and secular institutions; from vocational-technical institutes, community and junior colleges, four-year colleges, professional schools and universities; from towns of 500 and cities of several million, C-Es are as diverse as the Commission's member institutions. Such diversity makes genuine peer review a reality rather than a cliché. Yet for all their differences, the members of the Consultant-Evaluator Corps are similar in their willingness to give generously of their time and expertise, in their dedication to educational excellence, and in their commitment to the principles underlying voluntary accreditation.

Each year, the Commission strives, in inviting new educators to join the Corps, to reach its goals for a diverse and representative peer group that can effectively serve its purposes.

The Role and Responsibilities of Consultant-Evaluators

The educators who make up the teams that visit institutions are charged with two primary responsibilities. As consultants, they offer advice to institutions to help them improve the quality of the education and services they provide, and as evaluators, they evaluate and confirm the quality of an educational institution. The name Consultant-Evaluator is given to these educators to make sure both institutions and Evaluation Teams alike remain aware of this dual function.

Because the Commission bases its final evaluation decisions concerning higher education institutions on qualitative criteria rather than on inflexible or absolute quantitative standards, its Consultant-Evaluator Corps plays a far more critical role in the accreditation process than would be the case if a more automatic or "checklist" approach to determining educational quality were used. The selection, training, and evaluation of C-Es are crucial to the effectiveness and integrity of the accreditation process, as is the formation of particular Evaluation Teams from the members of the Corps.

☐ C-Es as Generalists rather than Specialists

Institutional accreditation by the Commission testifies to an institution's overall health and the general quality of its resources, processes, services, and programs, but not necessarily to the merit of each specific individual program and component within the institution. Therefore, the Commission selects and prepares its C-Es to undertake institutional evaluation as generalists rather than as administrative or programmatic specialists. When the need for subject-area or function-area specialists arises (e.g., to examine an institution's request to begin programs in health sciences or to evaluate an institution's computer resources and plans), the Commission places a person with that expertise on a team; but C-Es are always cautioned not to confuse institutional and programmatic accreditation. Because of its expectation that C-Es serve as generalists, the Commission does not attempt in appointing a team to visit an institution to assure that every subject-area specialty can be evaluated in depth.

☐ Expectations of Evaluation Teams

If peer review is to maintain its credibility as an effective tool in self-regulation and self-improvement, then its teams—and all members on them—must be marked by the following qualities:

- **Professionalism.** Effective peer review requires that teams and individual C-Es fulfill their tasks in a professional manner.
    - ◇ **Preparing.** Commission visits are short (two or three days, typically), and Evaluation Teams are relatively small. Therefore, it is important for each team member to be a good reader, absorbing as much information as possible before the team visit. C-Es must study Commission documents, read critically the institution's materials before the visit begins, and identify questions and issues for investigation before they arrive on campus. The ability of a team to conduct an effective and efficient evaluation rests heavily on the individual preparation of each member.
    - ◇ **Making decisions.** Teams are asked to exercise their best judgment in assessing an institution, using the Commission's General Institutional Requirements and Criteria for Accreditation. Participation in an evaluation visit to an institution may require a C-E to make difficult decisions, whether positive or negative. The ability to discharge these responsibilities diligently and confidently, even in the face of conflicting personal feelings or preferences, characterizes the truly effective team and C-E.
    - ◇ **Protecting confidentiality.** C-Es are expected to hold in confidence all information obtained from the evaluation visit, from discussions with other team members or with Commission staff, and from Commission file materials (previous team reports, correspondence, complaints, etc.). Because the team's written report of the visit is the document that represents the team's consensus judgment, individual C-Es should refrain from discussing the visit with anyone outside the Evaluation Team. If C-Es receive comments or questions from or about the institution they have visited, they should refer them to the Commission staff liaison or the Executive Director. Under no circumstances should they discuss the details of the team's deliberations or try to speak for the team.
    - ◇ **Valuing collegiality.** Serving on a team requires an individual to strike a balance between individual views and judgments and those held by colleagues. Just as team members share the

burdens of the evaluation visit, they are expected to strive for consensus in reaching decisions about an institution's accreditability and the reasons for it.

- **Competence.** Effective teams, and effective C-Es, need particular competencies.
  - ◇ **Interviewing and listening.** During the evaluation visit the team will interact with a wide variety of people in many different settings. The team is there to learn about the institution in an effort to be fair in its evaluation of it. Therefore, it is critical not only that its members conduct penetrating, yet collegial, interviews, but also that they are capable of hearing clearly the responses provided. Because the diversity of institutions evaluated by the Commission places C-Es in contact with others who may have significantly different cultural traditions and professional viewpoints, courtesy and empathy for others' feelings are hallmarks of the effective interviewer.
  - ◇ **Writing effectively.** Although the ability to communicate orally is of critical importance for C-Es, the written team report is ultimately the vehicle by which a team informs the Commission of its evaluation and recommendations. Given this central role of the written word, fluency in writing is an indispensable skill for all C-Es who must explain and document their conclusions and evaluations. In the end, it is the Team Chair's responsibility to collect and edit the team members' contributions into a single, coherent report; but that is possible only when the individual members perform the assignments given them and follow agreed-upon guidelines for their written contributions to the report.
- **Objectivity.** One of the greatest challenges for teams and C-Es is to approach their task with objectivity.
  - ◇ **Fairness.** Most of what the Commission prescribes in evaluating an institution requires teams to exercise judgment. C-Es must look for and document an overall pattern of evidence that satisfies the Commission's Criteria while balancing an institution's strengths and weaknesses in reaching a judgment. Thoughtful evaluators are not satisfied by single opinions without validation; they seek and expect a pattern of evidence on which to base their conclusions. This expectation places an important responsibility on C-Es to be fair, to see all things in perspective, and neither overlook nor be overpowered by an institution's individual virtues and faults.
  - ◇ **Appreciation of good practice.** Service on an Evaluation Team requires an understanding of the traditions and values of American higher education and the ability to identify what is appropriate for a particular institution, in terms of the institution's mission and purposes; how well the institution has progressed since its last evaluation; and what is generally recognized as good practice at similar or "peer" institutions.
  - ◇ **Ability to balance the roles of consultant and evaluator.** To avoid confusing the institution or the Commission, C-Es need to balance and keep distinct their roles as evaluators and consultants. If, for any reason, conflict arises between the two roles, C-Es must view their function as evaluators and recommenders of Commission action as primary.

Teams and C-Es are evaluated regularly. Members of the team, the Team Chair, institutional representatives, and Commission staff members contribute to these evaluations. Areas of evaluation by team members include preparation, participation, professionalism, and judgment. Team Chairs comment on the quality and timeliness of the written materials submitted by team members. The evaluation process offers the Commission reasonable assurance that its C-Es fulfill the Commission's expectations, and it assists the Commission staff in developing appropriate training and retraining programs as well as printed materials for new and experienced C-Es. Moreover, following Commission policy II.A.5, the Commission can terminate the service of a C-E who fails to fulfill expectations and requirements (for example, by engaging in discriminatory or harassing activities, failing to prepare, failing to meet established schedules, failing to maintain confidentiality, or failing to attend required Commission-sponsored training).

☐ Experience and Training of the Consultant-Evaluator Corps

During the late 1950's, the Commission developed and eventually adopted in policy the notion of selecting its accreditation teams from a trained and experienced corps of evaluators. In adopting this strategy, the Commission reasoned that it could enhance the reliability of its team evaluations by restricting the size of the corps from which team members were drawn. After making several visits over a relatively short period of time, C-Es bring to the evaluation process the wisdom and sensitivity accrued through those visits. Because the Commission employs teams that, collectively, embody much training and experience in conducting its evaluations, NCA Evaluation Teams tend to be relatively small. Also, because of the Commission's commitment to peer review and the experience level of teams, it is unnecessary for Commission staff to accompany teams on visits. This experience level also ensures that new C-Es receive additional mentoring on site.

To ensure currency and vitality in the corps, the Commission tries to invite every C-E to participate in one or two visits during each academic year. Consequently, the Commission remains committed to limiting the overall size of its Corps.

NCA continues to improve the effectiveness of the Corps through enhanced training programs, especially those provided yearly for new and experienced C-Es in conjunction with the Annual Meeting; through continuing efforts to identify and recruit appropriate members; and through ongoing evaluation of the Corps. All C-Es must attend a Professional Development Program within two years of initial appointment. Throughout their service, they are encouraged to participate regularly in professional development opportunities.

☐ Terms of Service for Consultant-Evaluators

C-Es are initially appointed to the Corps for a trial period, during which they may be invited to participate in up to two evaluation visits each year. After completing the second visit (or at the end of three years, whichever comes first) the appointment will be reviewed. If invited to continue on the Corps, a C-E begins a five-year regular appointment.

Service on the Corps may be renewed or terminated for these reasons:

- At the completion of a regular five-year term of service, the Commission reviews a C-E's performance. Depending on its needs, the Commission may invite C-Es to apply for reappointment for additional five-year terms.

- When a C-E moves from one Commission-accredited institution to another, his or her place on the Corps will be reviewed.

- C-Es who resign or retire from full-time employment at their institutions, who move out of the North Central Association's 19-state region, or who accept a position at an unaccredited institution within the region are no longer eligible for service in the Consultant-Evaluator Corps.

- C-Es who cease to be employed full-time at Commission-accredited institutions, or whose employers place them upon leave status (sabbatical, medical, etc.), are asked to notify the Executive Director immediately. In some cases, the C-E may be placed on inactive status within the Consultant-Evaluator Corps for up to a one-year period.

- A C-E who is employed at an institution that is placed on Probation by the Commission will be placed on inactive status until the institution is removed from probation.

- C-Es who fail to fulfill the Professional Development requirement will be removed from the Corps.

☐ The Team Chair Corps

Within the Consultant-Evaluator Corps the Commission has identified a Team Chair Corps. From this Corps the staff typically selects those who chair Evaluation Teams.

- ◇ C-Es may be recommended for the Team Chair Corps by Chairs with whom they have served.
- ◇ C-Es may indicate their interest in Team Chair service when they register for the C-E Professional Development Program at the Annual Meeting.
- ◇ C-Es who, at the request of staff, serve as Team Chairs are invited to join the Team Chair Corps.

Appointment to the Team Chair Corps automatically initiates a new five-year term as a C-E. C-Es who are invited to join the Team Chair Corps usually participate in an orientation program at the Annual Meeting prior to service; in some cases, they may participate in the next session following their service. Thereafter, they attend at least one Team Chair Professional Development Program in each five-year term. A C-E may resign from the Team Chair Corps at any time and still remain in the Consultant-Evaluator Corps for the remainder of the current term of service.

☐ Scheduling Visits and Team Invitations

The Commission follows a number of standard practices in arranging evaluation visits.

- **Invitations to serve.** In late spring, the Commission staff plans most of the team visits for the coming year. Suggested team members' names are submitted to the institution being visited in order to discover possible conflicts of interest and to identify potential problems. Then, in May, June, or July, the Commission mails invitations to participate to individual C-Es. If C-Es find that previously-scheduled commitments make participation impossible, the process is repeated until the team is complete, at which time the institution and each C-E receives an updated Evaluation Visit Summary Sheet (EVSS) and other materials related to the visit. Generally, teams are complete at least two months before the date the visit is scheduled to begin.

  New evaluation visits are added to the Commission's schedule throughout the year. These visits may occur for a variety of reasons, including the need for an on-site evaluation to review a request for initial status or for a proposed institutional change. C-E's may receive invitations to participate in additional Commission evaluations at any time during the year.

- **Frequency of visits.** C-Es serving on the Corps are normally invited to participate in up to two visits per year, usually one in the fall and one in the spring. Rarely, when circumstances and Commission needs require, a C-E may be invited for three visits in one year. Each year, however, because of the unique nature of the visits scheduled for that year, some C-Es may receive no invitations.

- **Accepting the invitation.** C-Es should remember that the commitment for a visit is significant.
  - ◇ Most comprehensive evaluation visits, although formally three days, require four days, including travel time. One of those days will fall on a weekend, typically Sunday. Team members arrive in the late afternoon on the day before the visit formally begins; they participate fully, through the exit interview that is held the afternoon of the last formal day of the visit. The honorarium paid to team members is based on the actual number of visit days and does not include the time spent traveling.
  - ◇ Immediately following the visit, members of the team will be involved in writing parts of the Team Report and revising the report before its submission to the institution and to the Commission.

◇ The Commission understands that C-Es have many pressures and obligations other than evaluation visits, but expects that a C-E who wishes to remain active in the Corps will make every effort to accept an invitation to participate in a visit. It is, however, easier to replace a C-E on a team at the invitation stage than it is later in the process. Therefore, if a high likelihood exists that schedule conflicts will cause a C-E to resign later from a team, declining the original invitation to serve is preferable.

- **Handling emergencies.** Time and communication constraints often may make it impossible to find substitutes for team members less than a month before a scheduled evaluation visit. Nevertheless, if unavoidable conditions make it necessary for C-Es to withdraw from a visit, they should notify the Commission staff as early as possible. The withdrawing C-E is responsible for seeing that all Commission and institution materials are forwarded promptly to any replacement.

☐ Avoiding Conflict of Interest

Consultant-Evaluators must be able to examine and evaluate institutions objectively. In an effort to guard against the appearance of conflict of interest in the Commission's processes, staff build all teams following specific Commission guidelines that flow from Commission policies. Commission policy prohibits a C-E's evaluation of an institution located in the C-E's home state, an institution at which the C-E was or is now an employee, or an institution from which the C-E graduated. Commission policy normally prohibits the use of C-Es on visits to institutions they have evaluated in the previous five years (unless the institution explicitly approves such participation), and tradition generally guards against C-Es being invited to visit institutions for two successive comprehensive Commission evaluations. In general, the same principles should apply if a C-E has visited an institution for specialized or programmatic accreditation.

However, since staff cannot know of every possible conflict of interest, C-Es themselves are asked to refuse invitations or assignments if any conflict of interest might be possible. C-Es should contact the staff liaison who is coordinating the visit if they have questions about eligibility for service.

- **Personal/professional relationships.** C-Es should disqualify themselves from participation in evaluating institutions where they have or where they are seeking employment, where they have served as a paid or unpaid consultant, or where any other set of circumstances would inhibit their ability to evaluate the institution objectively. Similarly, personal relationships (kinship with staff or students, relationships with key administrators or faculty) may prevent C-Es from evaluating the institution fairly. Prominent and active educators often have a wide circle of acquaintances in a variety of institutions, so mere acquaintance with persons at an institution being evaluated does not, in itself, render a C-E ineligible to visit that institution. What matters is the level of the relationship, whether it is likely to color the C-E's judgment or affect the C-E's willingness to make particular recommendations.

- **Preconceived judgments.** Good or bad, the reputations of many institutions precede them. C-Es who have serious difficulty objectively judging an institution about which they have already formed strong impressions from second-hand or unsubstantiated evidence should decline the invitation to evaluate that institution. The Commission accredits a variety of institutions, public and private, non-profit and for-profit, secular and religious, undergraduate and graduate, general and special purpose. C-Es may be invited to participate in the evaluation of an institution from a category for or against which they have developed strong opinions. If this occurs, C-Es should decline the invitation, and should discuss with the Commission staff the nature and basis for their beliefs so they will not be invited for similar evaluations in the future.

These guidelines also govern the Commission's choices of participants in other review processes (e.g., Readers' or Evaluators' Panels and Review Committees).

☐ Consultant-Evaluators and Outside Consulting

A Consultant-Evaluator must use good judgment in seeking or accepting consulting assignments with institutions affiliated with the Commission. Commission policy stipulates that, to avoid the appearance of possible conflict of interest in the accreditation process, no member of the team that evaluated an institution should serve as a consultant to that institution for a period of one year following the official Commission accrediting action. Any C-E who violates this policy will be dropped automatically from the C-E Corps.

From time to time, Commission staff provide to institutions and to other agencies names of C-Es whose services might be useful. In doing so, the staff is recognizing the professional competencies of the C-Es, not proposing that they serve in an official or semi-official capacity for the Commission.

C-Es should never claim to possess special or "inside" information on determinations that the Commission will make on accreditation or related policies, or to be able to ensure that an institution will meet Commission expectations. C-Es should not refer to service with the Commission on business cards or letterhead, and should not identify on resumés or other documents the names of institutions that they have evaluated.

OTHER ROLES OF CONSULTANT-EVALUATORS

☐ Accreditation Review Council Members

Accreditation Review Council (ARC) members are current Consultant-Evaluators who have been elected to four-year terms under procedures established by the Commission Rules of Procedure to participate in the Commission's review processes. The primary responsibility of this group of approximately 110 ARC members is service as Readers and Review Committee members.

As Readers, ARC members examine the documents resulting from the evaluation visit to determine whether further review is necessary before final action is taken by the Commission. As Review Committee members, they meet with representatives of the team and the institution at periodic meetings in Chicago to discuss the documents and to forward a recommendation to the Commission for final action. They also serve as Advisory Panel members, providing advice and assistance to Commission staff on various matters related to the evaluation process.

☐ Commissioners

Commissioners make up the decision and policy-making body of the Commission. They are responsible for decisions on the accreditation of institutions, for the formulation of Commission policies, and for oversight of Commission operations. The Commission is composed of 15 persons: 12 are actively and officially connected with member institutions; three are public representatives. The Commission meets four times a year and conducts business with the help of its three standing committees: The Executive Committee, the Committee on Institutional Actions, and the Committee on Commission Programs and Activities. A current roster of Commission members appears in the Appendix.

Commissioners may serve on Evaluation Teams with reasonable frequency. They do not serve as Team Chairs, or as members of Readers' Panels, Evaluators' Panels, or Review Committees. Commissioners do not participate in Commission discussion and voting related to final actions on institutions located in their individual states, on institutions that they have visited for the Commission, and on institutions about which they have identified other potential conflicts of interest.

☐ Association Appeals Panel

C-Es also serve on the Association Appeals Panel. The Appeals Panel is composed of 12 persons–six from the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education and six from the Commission on Schools–elected for six-year terms ending in different years. If an appeal is made from an accrediting decision of either Commission, a committee to hear the appeal is drawn from the panel. More members than are necessary to form a committee are available on the panel to permit choices that avoid conflict of interest. Additional information on the Association's Appeals Process is available on the Commission's Web site [www.ncacihe.org].

JOINING THE CONSULTANT-EVALUATOR CORPS

Approximately 100 new evaluators are invited to join the Corps each year when current C-Es' terms of service expire or when they retire, leave the region, or for other reasons become ineligible to continue. The Commission fills these vacancies with educators who have the skills and talents needed to meet the special needs for upcoming evaluation visits. Preference may be given to persons from underrepresented states or unrepresented institutions. In selecting people for the Corps, the Commission does not discriminate on matters of race, ethnicity, creed, gender, sexual orientation, or physical disabilities.

Faculty and administrators at accredited institutions who meet the following criteria may be invited to join the Consultant-Evaluator Corps.

- They are official and active full-time employees of higher education institutions currently accredited by the North Central Association, or they are public members of the Commission, or they are members of institutional governing boards.
- They provide evidence that their training, experience, and accomplishments will contribute judgment and expertise to the accreditation process.
- They meet the projected future needs of the Commission for team members and Evaluators' Panel members–possessing, collectively, those characteristics critical in the formation of teams and panels (i.e., academic discipline, administrative skills, professional competencies, institutional experience, home state, etc.).
- They represent the diversity of people–professional administrators and faculty; men and women; individuals of varied racial, ethnic, religious, and national backgrounds–engaged in higher education in all geographical areas within the 19-state North Central region.
- They are able and willing to commit to the Commission the time and energy necessary for the accreditation process to move smoothly.

New C-Es are selected by the Commission staff under the oversight of the Commission's Committee on Commission Programs and Activities. Selections are based on the needs of the C-E Corps for the next several evaluation cycles and the number of slots available to be filled. Because of the number of applications received, applicants must be considered in light of the specific goals of the Commission (e.g., desire for diversity on the Corps, types and subjects of projected evaluation visits, characteristics of institutions scheduled for visits, etc.), and not all of the applicants can be invited to join the Corps. Appointments for the next evaluation cycle (academic year) are made in October of the previous evaluation cycle.

Any eligible person who would like to be considered for the Corps can obtain a Professional Data Form (PDF) on the Commission's Web site [www.ncacihe.org] or from the Commission office. The PDF serves as the official application. Institutional presidents are informed of all appointments to the Corps from their institutions.

7 Logistics for Evaluation Visits

INSTITUTIONAL PREPARATIONS FOR THE EVALUATION VISIT

☐ Initiating the Evaluation Process

Institutions currently affiliated with the Commission are scheduled for evaluation by prior Commission action. Approximately two years before that scheduled evaluation, the Commission staff liaison sends the Executive Officer a reminder letter about the forthcoming evaluation visit. In response, the Executive Officer

- ◇ confirms or requests changes in the institution's status with the Commission;
- ◇ names the institution's Self-Study Coordinator;
- ◇ suggests three possible dates for the evaluation visit.

At this time, the institution begins to develop for itself and the Commission a plan for its self-study process that briefly describes the study's design, strategies, timetable, and Self-Study Report outline.

One year before the evaluation visit, the institution receives another reminder letter. In response, the Executive Officer confirms the time and purpose of the scheduled visit and indicates the competencies the institution would like to see represented on the Evaluation Team. Focused evaluations called for by prior Commission actions follow this same procedure.

☐ Choosing the Dates for the Visit

Establishing the evaluation date early in the process enables the institution to develop a solid time line for its preparations and enables the Commission to coordinate the approximately 200 evaluations that will occur in most annual evaluation cycles.

- ◇ The institution is asked to suggest three possible dates for the evaluation visit.
- ◇ The Commission will give preference to the institution's first choice and will notify the institution only if the first choice of dates cannot be honored.
- ◇ The second reminder letter is sent approximately one year before the visit; the Commission will reconfirm the scheduled date. The institution may request a change in the evaluation dates at this time.
- ◇ The institution makes a firm commitment to the visit dates when it approves the proposed team.

In choosing the dates for the visit, an institution should be sure

- ◇ that faculty and administration will be available;
- ◇ that students will be in classes (not during breaks, holidays, or vacations);
- ◇ that other scheduled campus activities will not make it difficult for the team to do its work;

- that the date will permit timely action (e.g., if the evaluation includes a request for changes or if it is for initial candidacy or initial accreditation, the institution should consider the date of final Commission action, perhaps several months after the team visit, and choose a date that will permit timely action);
- that the visit will not conflict with the schedule of professional meetings that might involve people from the campus or members of the team (e.g., the NCA Annual Meeting, AACJC, AAHE). The Commission calendar of Review Committees, Commission meetings, and the Annual Meeting is published in the *Briefing* newsletter and on the Commission's Web site.

Experience shows that teams prefer visits that begin on Monday. This allows them to travel on Sunday (some take advantage of less expensive airplane fares by traveling on Saturday) and return home at the end of the last day of the visit.

Rescheduling the Evaluation Visit

Sometimes visits are cancelled or postponed at the institution's initiative and with the Commission's approval. On rare occasions rescheduling is necessary close to the time of the visit. When significant events beyond the control of the institution and the Commission occur, the Commission staff should be notified immediately and be given the opportunity to decide, in consultation with the institution, whether the visit should proceed as planned or be rescheduled. If the visit is cancelled or postponed at the institution's request, the Commission will refund all fees paid for that evaluation, less any expenses incurred (e.g., penalties for cancelled plane tickets).

The Selection of the Evaluation Team

During the year preceding the visit, the institution is invited to suggest to the staff liaison the areas of expertise and kinds of institutions it would like to see represented on the Evaluation Team. The staff liaison considers these suggestions when composing an appropriate team from among the members of the Consultant-Evaluator Corps. (In those cases where an institutional evaluation requires a professional background that no current member of the Corps has, the staff may suggest educators from outside of the Corps or outside of the region.)

The specific number of persons composing the team to be sent to visit an institution is determined by the Commission staff, who will be guided by the following considerations in establishing team size:

- **Team size for comprehensive visits**
  - The minimum team size for a comprehensive visit is four team members.
  - The team will consist of the smallest number of members needed to make a thorough and professional evaluation of the particular institution to be visited. However, the institution has the right to ask for a team larger than the typical range.
  - The factors listed below establish the range as the base size for a team assigned to a comprehensive visit:
    - relationship of FTE to headcount;
    - number of degree levels;
    - number of degree programs;
    - closely located off-campus sites.

Taking these four factors into account, the following list represents the ranges for base team size for comprehensive visits, including visits for initial status:

FTE	Base Range
1-3,999	4-6 team members
4,000-6,999	5-7 team members
7,000-8,999	6-8 team members
9,000-15,999	7-9 team members
16,000+	8-11 team members

◇ The first three considerations above establish the base for determining the final number of team members. Additional factors that affect the total number of team members may include, but are not limited to:

- the number of major colleges and/or professional schools (e.g., schools of medicine and law as well as graduate schools, especially in research and/or service intensive universities);
- the number and scope of proposed institutional changes being considered;
- substantial expansion of degree programs since the last comprehensive evaluation;
- the extent of prior institutional change (i.e., focused visits, Evaluators' Panels, staff recommended changes) since the last comprehensive evaluation;
- extent of off-campus programming, including
    - degree programs offered at off-campus locations within the home state,
    - degree programs offered out of state,
    - degree programs offered at international sites,
    - out-of-state and out-of-country course offerings, and/or
    - external degree programs;
- extent of degree completion programs;
- distance delivery degree programs, including those using Internet, computers, television, satellite, correspondence, and independent study;
- the selection of a Special Emphases Self-Study/Evaluation option.

Note: The size and composition of teams for special emphases, experimental, and other non-standard comprehensive visits may vary from these figures.

■ Team size for other types of evaluations

◇ Typical team sizes for other types of evaluations are shown in the following list. Team size may differ from that shown below based on the considerations stated above.

Type of Visit	Team Size
Continued Candidacy	3 team members
Commission-Mandated Focused Visit	2-3 team members
Focused Visit at the Institution's Request	2-4 team members

Several months before the visit is to take place, the staff member sends a roster of proposed Evaluation Team members to the Executive Officer of the institution for comment. This list is accompanied by Professional Data Forms providing information about each proposed team member's current position, experience, and areas of expertise. The institution should express any concerns or reservations it may have about any of the proposed team members; these concerns are considered when the Commission staff member develops the final team. The Commission reserves the right to make the final choice of all Evaluation Teams; it has determined that staff will take into account the Commission's commitment to equity and diversity in the composition of teams. It also makes every effort to alleviate serious institutional concerns about a proposed-team member. The institution is consulted on any subsequent changes in the team's makeup because of such things as scheduling conflicts and emergencies.

The institution should not contact team members until it has been advised that the team is complete.

☐ The Evaluation Visit Summary Sheet

Once team members accept an evaluation assignment, the Commission formally notifies the institution and the team and distributes an **Evaluation Visit Summary Sheet** (EVSS). This document provides a brief description of both the institution and the visit, including the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of the executive officer, the team members, and the Commission staff liaison.

☐ Observers during the Team Visit

From time-to-time institutions ask whether observers—representatives from national church boards or state regents, for example—may be present during the team visit. The staff will consider each request on a case-by-case basis. The Team Chair, the institution, and the Commission staff liaison must agree that the observer may be present. The Team Chair must assure that the observer does not participate in the team's final decision.

☐ Logistical Arrangements

Either the Executive Officer or the Team Chair will make hotel reservations for the team. If possible, a meeting room should be reserved at the hotel for team meetings. A meeting and work room on campus also will be needed. That meeting room should house the institutional materials the team will need for review and reference. Secretarial assistance, ready access to computers, printers, a fax machine, and a private telephone also are desirable.

Some Team Chairs want to schedule in advance meetings with key personnel: members of the governing board, representatives of the state coordinating board or other related agency, faculty representatives, student representatives, and alumni and community leaders.

Most Team Chairs schedule special meetings with the governing board and hold open meetings for faculty and staff. The institution should announce the visit, schedule time slots, and ask its people to be on campus, available to the team. The institution might host a meal function or social hour at its own expense some time during the visit; typically, such an event (e.g., a luncheon or dinner meeting with Trustees or department chairs) is small and allows the team to accomplish some of its work.

Teams do not expect gifts and institutions should not offer them. A souvenir (e.g., a mug) might be an appropriate token of appreciation from the institution. However, the Commission expects that its teams will not be offered gifts that could in any way be perceived as influencing their objectivity.

☐ Budgeting for the Evaluation Process

The Commission bills the institution for the evaluation according to its current Evaluation Fee Schedule (see Chapter 10). The institution must pay the evaluation fee at least one month before the evaluation visit. In some cases, the visit may be billed on the basis of actual costs plus a flat fee for administrative expenses. In those cases, the Commission may require a deposit before the visit.

When it pays that fee, the institution has no more financial responsibilities for the team's transportation, housing, and meals except for the limited social event it might choose to host.

> Team members expect to pay for their own expenses, including hotel bills. Unless special arrangements are made with the staff (particularly for "cost-plus" visits), institutions should not attempt to pay bills that clearly belong to the team; such attempts simply lead to misunderstandings that interfere with the visit. An institution is not obligated to transport the team during the visit, but if it does provide a car or livery service, it absorbs those costs.

In budgeting for the self-study and evaluation processes, an institution should include:

- ◇ overhead, such as released time for the Self-Study Coordinator, secretarial help, costs of gathering data, postage, and special equipment;
- ◇ costs of printing multiple copies of the Self-Study Report and other documents;
- ◇ the fixed fee; and
- ◇ limited entertainment expenses.

Some visits require a Review Committee appearance (see Chapter 9); in these cases the institution should budget for travel and lodging for two or three people to come to Chicago. Some evaluations may require a previsit by the Team Chair; in these cases the institution is billed on the basis of actual cost plus 10% for administration (see Chapter 11).

☐ Materials for the Evaluation Process

The institution sends its Self-Study Report, completed Basic Institutional Data forms, the last two financial audits, and the latest institutional catalog(s) and faculty and student handbooks to the Commission and to all team members. The Commission sends to the team relevant materials from its files (see Chapter 10).

☐ Announcing the Visit

The institution should announce the dates of the team's visit in appropriate publications to all its constituencies. People at an institution should understand the typical flow of a team visit; they should know the people who definitely will be interviewed; they should know when the team will hold open meetings. Too frequently people on campus expect that all team contacts will be through formal, scheduled interviews, and they forego the open meetings and wait for team members to come to them. Teams have limited time and extensive responsibilities; even the tightest schedule will not allow teams to spend time with everyone on campus. Many teams mix formal and informal interviews; they might meet in a scheduled session with student government leaders, for example, but they might also simply scatter themselves through the cafeteria during lunch and speak with random groups of students. Teams also have to spend considerable time reading additional materials prepared for their on-site review; therefore, they will not be continually interacting with people on the campus. For further information on announcing the visit, see the section on "Third Party Comment" in Chapter 5.

TEAM PREPARATIONS FOR THE VISIT

The Team Chair carries significant responsibilities before, during, and after the on-site visit. These responsibilities are highlighted in the sections that follow. Team members also have responsibilities, as noted in the text.

☐ Establishing Lines of Communication

When notified that the team is complete, **the Team Chair** is asked to contact the institution's Executive Officer to make arrangements for the visit. (Team members should not contact the institution individually.) Together, **the Team Chair and the Executive Officer**

- identify the key people and groups at the institution to be interviewed during the team visit,
- make arrangements for the team's hotel accommodations,
- agree on the materials and facilities that will be at the team's disposal while they are on campus, and
- discuss any other aspects of the visit that need to be worked out beforehand.

Because teams are often completed months before a visit is scheduled to occur, **the Team Chair** should make an initial contact with the institution and the team soon after the team is complete to advise the Executive Officer and the Self-Study Coordinator when more specific details of the visit will be forthcoming. If subsequent changes in the team are made, the Team Chair should use the **most recent** Evaluation Visit Summary Sheet (EVSS) in communicating with the team.

In special cases, **the Team Chair** may arrange for a **pre-visit** if the institution requests it and the Commission staff concurs. Pre-visits are scheduled only when an institution believes that its structure or geographical locations require substantial advance discussion (see Chapter 11).

☐ Planning for the Visit

The Team Chair writes to the team members to inform them of preliminary arrangements for the visit. Throughout the planning process, the Team Chair keeps team members informed. Team members need information about arrival time, housing, the time and place of their first team meeting, when they can expect to finish their work, and a variety of other practical matters. **Team members** should notify the Team Chair as early as possible of any special needs for the on-site visit, such as physical needs or dietary restrictions.

In addition to an EVSS, **the Team Chair** receives a **Professional Data Form** for each of the team members. These forms provide information about the background and competencies of each member of the team. The Team Chair should also use the Professional Data Form information to develop a tentative evaluation plan and division of responsibilities. By sharing the plan with the team some weeks before the visit, the Chair might make important adjustments before the first team meeting. The Chair should stress that each team member is to become familiar with all of the institution's written materials before the visit takes place.

If the team includes a new member of the corps, **the Team Chair** should arrange for that person to work with more experienced members of the team.

☐ Analyzing the Materials for the Visit

Before the visit, **team members** thoroughly study all of the materials they have received from the institution and the Commission. Since the self-study process has taken many months, it is important that **each team member** understand the nature of the process. It may be comprehensive, or comprehensive with special emphases. It may also be built around a current special institutional study or around documents produced by a regular institutional research program.

The Commission staff will make any special aspects (such as special emphases) of the self-study design known to the team through a Memo of Understanding, and the institution will describe them in its Self-Study Report.

The Self-Study Report is the team's basic reference during the visit, since the report is required to demonstrate clearly and explicitly that the institution meets GIRs and the Criteria for Accreditation or the Candidacy Program. As they read it before the visit, **the Team Chair and team members** should ask themselves a number of questions.

- ◇ Does the Self-Study Report show that the institution has conducted a candid, comprehensive, and useful self-study process?
- ◇ Does the Self-Study Report contain the information required by the Commission as described in Chapter 5?
- ◇ Does it adequately demonstrate that the General Institutional Requirements are met?
- ◇ Does it provide patterns of evidence that the institution fulfills the Criteria for Accreditation or an emerging pattern of evidence for the Candidacy Program? If it does not, what further evidence is required? What needs amplification, clarification, or special examination?
- ◇ Has the institution addressed the concerns identified by previous Evaluation Teams and other Commission reviews?
- ◇ Is the institution implementing an appropriate program for documenting student academic achievement (see Criteria Three and Four) across all of its academic programs?
- ◇ Is the Self-Study Report sufficiently evaluative?
- ◇ Are there inconsistencies between the Self-Study Report and information in the Basic Institutional Data Forms, the catalog(s), the faculty or student handbooks, or the Annual Report?
- ◇ Are there inconsistencies between the information in the Self-Study Report and that provided in the materials the team received from the Commission?
- ◇ Who are the key people and groups to interview?
- ◇ What functions, operations, or program areas deserve special attention?
- ◇ What institutional strengths and challenges does the Self-Study Report identify? Is there an action plan for responding to the challenges?

It is important for the team to remember that its charge is to evaluate the institution, not just the Self-Study Report. A poor Self-Study Report may make a team's task more difficult, but it does not necessarily mean that an institution does not meet the GIRs and the Criteria; conversely, a well-written Self-Study Report is not a substitute for meeting the GIRs or fulfilling the Criteria.

Sometimes a **Team Chair** concludes that the team needs further information or documentation before it arrives on campus. Before asking the institution to supply extra materials, the Team Chair should contact the Commission staff.

The Commission also sends information to the team and the institution for review before the evaluation visit. After examining all of these materials, **the team** should be prepared to approach its first team meeting with a clear idea of questions and points it will want to discuss and examine during the evaluation.

Since each team member's familiarity with Commission policies and procedures will differ, one of **the Team Chair's** major responsibilities throughout the evaluation visit is to orient the team to the Commission's philosophy and practices. The *Handbook of Accreditation* is required reading for **every team member.** In addition, the Commission staff may distribute specific policy statements that apply to a particular evaluation. The Team Chair must serve as the on-site guide for the application and interpretation of these documents as bases for the team's evaluation and recommendation.

☐ The Commission Staff's Role during the Team Visit

Just as the Commission staff provides assistance to institutions preparing for the evaluation, it also provides assistance to Team Chairs and team members. Well before the visit is conducted, **the Team Chair** should discuss with the staff liaison any questions, particularly those about the adequacy of the size and/or expertise of the team.

During the visit, the Team Chair or the chief executive officer of the institution may call the Commission staff liaison to clarify Commission policy, to discuss special situations or concerns, or to confirm that the team is accurately describing the Commission's processes.

Situations where the Team Chair should contact the staff liaison include:

- confusion about the purpose of the evaluation visit
- inability to reach consensus on the team recommendation
- questions about options available to the team when making its recommendation
- team recommendations involving sanctions, denial of an institutional request, or the withdrawal of status
- disputes over Commission policies or practices

In preparing the Team Report, the Team Chair may seek advice from the Commission staff concerning its organization and content. The Team Chair should send copies of any correspondence related to the evaluation to the Commission staff member assigned to the institution.

The Team Chair submits the **draft** of the Team Report to the staff liaison **before** submitting it to the institution. The staff liaison provides the Team Chair with comments on the draft within a week of receipt.

The Commission believes that the accreditation process is based on the principle of peer review. However, a member of the Commission staff may join an Evaluation Team, but only as an observer and with the institution's approval.

☐ Team Expenses

Team members should pay their own travel, hotel, and meal expenses during the visit; they should submit expense vouchers to the Commission office when they return to their home campuses. **Expenses should not be billed to the institution or directly to the Commission.** The Commission promptly reimburses travel and subsistence expenses incurred by the team. Team members receive expense vouchers before an evaluation visit. Guidelines for reimbursable expenses are provided in "Policies and Procedures for Persons Traveling on Commission Business" available from the Commission office. Failure to follow established procedures can delay reimbursement.

CONDUCTING THE EVALUATION VISIT

☐ Making the Most of the Evaluation Visit

The institutions that derive the greatest benefit from evaluation visits are those with a clear and accurate sense of their strengths and their challenges. They are also the institutions that have prepared the total institutional community for the visit.

Evaluation Teams fill a dual role: they certify and they consult. When teams are struggling to uncover information related to certification, they tend not to be as useful in their consulting capacities. When they do provide informal observations and advice, these are sometimes misinterpreted and a comment is taken as an indictment. The best advice for an institution is to wait for the exit session and the Team Report to review the team's final evaluation. Those two formal parts of the visit will place many of the informal interchanges in a clearer context.

However, institutional representatives should speak with the Self-Study Coordinator if, during the visit, they are concerned that the team may be overlooking an important aspect of the institution. While the institution cannot tell the team how to conduct its visit, it can certainly express to the Team Chair any concerns it might have as the visit is progressing.

Teams cannot solve major problems; teams cannot resolve internal disputes. Institutions that politicize the visit only make it more difficult for the team to conduct an objective review. An institution experiencing tension is advised to do everything possible to assist the team in understanding the major factors contributing to the tension.

Candid communication, realistic expectations, institutional preparation, and open cooperation are the factors that make a team visit as productive to an institution as possible. In unique situations when institutional cooperation is lacking, the Executive Director may terminate a visit.

☐ Length of the Evaluation Visit

An evaluation for initial or continued accreditation or initial candidacy normally lasts three days; an evaluation for continued candidacy usually lasts two days. The day before the visit is to begin and the last day of the visit are partially devoted to travel to and from the institution; the remainder of the visit is spent on the institutional evaluation. However, if circumstances warrant it, the Team Chair may extend the visit beyond its scheduled length after consulting with the Commission staff.

Team members arrive the day before the visit officially begins for an initial team meeting. The **Team Chair** will have earlier notified each of them of the time of the meeting. Together, the Team Chair and the

Executive Officer will have decided either to arrange an informal dinner for the team to meet representatives of the institution or to leave the first evening free for the team to begin its work. If a social function is scheduled, it should be both early and brief.

☐ The First Team Meeting

At the team's first business meeting, **the Team Chair** should review the specific plans for the evaluation visit, establish final assignments, and make each team member's report-writing responsibilities clear. The Team Chair also should clarify the team's task, concentrate its attention, and establish a unified attitude toward the evaluation.

With these ideas and objectives in mind, the Team Chair usually establishes an agenda for the first team meeting that resembles the following.

- **Orientation.** Review the General Institutional Requirements, the Criteria for Accreditation, and the *Handbook of Accreditation.* Remind the team that all evaluation materials, conferences, conclusions, and recommendations are to be kept confidential.

- **Preliminary impressions.** Have an open exchange of preliminary reactions to the written materials the Evaluation Team has studied. Allow team members to share their analyses of the materials and identify any areas of conflicting opinion. Guard against *a priori* conclusions, but use this discussion to establish working hypotheses as points of departure for the team's first day of work.

- **Schedule and assignments.** Plan individual and team activities and establish a tentative timetable for each day. Assign responsibilities for interviews. During most evaluations, governing board members, every officer of the institution, every division/department head, and as many faculty members as possible should be consulted. In a small institution, every faculty member should have an opportunity to speak with some member of the team and as many students as possible should also be interviewed. The Evaluation Team usually schedules and publicizes an "open time" when team members will be available to speak to anyone who wants to see them. At Evaluation Team meetings throughout the evaluation visit, the Team Chair should check on the team's progress in interviewing campus people so that as many people as possible are seen, and no one who must be seen is omitted.

- **The Team Report.** Compiling the final report is the **Team Chair's** responsibility, but **team members are expected to draft those parts of the report that the Team Chair assigns them.** For the evaluation process to function on schedule, each team member must complete thoroughly and promptly the writing he or she has been assigned.

  It is critical that the Team Chair inform team members of how the report will be handled. Some Team Chairs prefer to have a rough draft of the Team Report completed before they leave campus; others request that sections be submitted within a week of the visit. The Team Chair may suggest that, while rough drafts are to be submitted by the end of the visit, anyone who wishes to write a more polished version for submission after he or she returns home is welcome to do so. But if the Chair wants to have a draft report in hand before leaving the campus, it will be necessary to encourage team members to record their reactions, questions, and judgments throughout the visit rather than waiting until the end.

- **Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status.** Before the evaluation visit, the Evaluation Team will receive a Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status (SAS) and the latest SISA from the Commission. The Worksheet should be reviewed at the first Team meeting. In the course of the visit, the team should verify the accuracy of the information currently listed on the SAS. The Worksheet also will include any changes for which the institution is seeking approval as a part of the current evaluation. The team should to determine whether any additional changes are contemplated. At the conclusion of the visit the team will use the SAS Worksheet to develop its formal recommendation to the Commission. The team confirms the accuracy of the SISA and reports to the staff any required corrections.

☐ Meetings with the Executive Officer

The **Evaluation Team's** first conference, on the morning the evaluation visit officially begins, should be with the Executive Officer of the institution and anyone else the Executive Officer invites. The Executive Officer will welcome the Evaluation Team, make some opening remarks about the institution and the visit, and perhaps introduce several key members of the administrative staff; the **Team Chair** will introduce the members of the team. This meeting is more than a social occasion; it establishes the tenor of the visit. The Executive Officer should be prepared to answer any initial questions the team may pose, and the team should be prepared to pose them. **The Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status and the SISA should be reviewed for accuracy.**

It is also useful for the Team Chair to state officially why the team is there (e.g., "to conduct a comprehensive evaluation for continued accreditation at the bachelor's degree-granting level") to make certain that there is no confusion.

If confusion does exist, the Team Chair should contact the Commission staff immediately.

The team may also use this meeting to confirm appointments with various members of the administration, faculty, staff, and governing board.

Whether the Team Chair or another member of the team conducts the interview, it is essential that the Executive Officer be interviewed at times in addition to the initial and final conferences.

Periodically during the visit the Team Chair should check with the Executive Officer to ensure that appropriate interviews are being conducted. The Team Chair should keep a record of interviews. This alleviates post-visit confusion that occurs when disagreements arise about whether certain interviews were conducted.

☐ Data Gathering and Evaluation

Sound recommendations and decisions about whether an institution meets the Commission's GIRs and Criteria for Accreditation require a firm base of accurate data and other information. No single method of assembling and analyzing this information can be specified. However, some general principles should guide the **Evaluation Team** during the visit.

- ◇ The team must judge the institution **as a whole.** Therefore, the team needs to make sure that it has sufficient information about the entire institution to make its deliberations. This information should be found in the Self-Study Report.
- ◇ In a **comprehensive evaluation with special emphases,** documentation that the institution meets the General Institutional Requirements and the Criteria for Accreditation should be complete, even if less voluminous. However, unless the first day of the visit provides reason to doubt the accuracy of the information, the team should spend more time focusing on the special emphases than on confirmation that the Criteria are met.

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◇ Since the collection of data about an institution could be endless, the team needs to determine the extent and the kinds of data it must have to make its evaluation. This should be based on the level of detail appropriate to the judgment to be rendered--a judgment on the institution as a whole rather than on every single activity within it. The financial condition of the institution is important, for example, but the information the team needs about finances typically can be found in summary audit reports rather than in extensive examination of every item of expenditure, unless the audit reports raise concerns.

◇ If the institution has a procedure for accomplishing a particular task, the team's responsibility is to examine the procedure and its application in a few cases, not to examine each application individually as if a guiding procedure were not in place.

◇ Sampling, where appropriate, can be an efficient way to obtain needed information in the limited time available to a team. Sampling assumes that a few randomly chosen individual cases will represent a whole group reasonably well. These are some examples:

  ○ *Faculty credentials.* Characteristics of the faculty as a whole often can be determined from a representative sample of credentials.

  ○ *Student records.* Examination of selected student records sheds light on whether admissions policies are followed, whether general course requirements are enforced, and whether graduation requirements are met.

  ○ *Library holdings.* Spot checks of randomly selected sections of the holdings give a basis for judging the adequacy of the collection for the institution's purposes.

  ○ *Student papers.* Course papers, theses, and dissertations provide evidence of the standards to which students are held for graduation.

  ○ *Interviews.* In large and complex institutions, sampling select individual students, faculty members, administrators, and persons from other groups can provide information about the views of such groups on institutional activities. The team should plan to interview a representative sample of the institution's administrators, division/department heads, faculty, and students. Often, group interviews conducted by individual team members are the most efficient way to speak to as many people as possible.

In many cases, the Evaluation Team will determine that adequate information about various aspects of the institution appears in its Self-Study Report and related documents. In such cases, informal verification, by sampling, will often allow the team to use the rest of the Self-Study Report with confidence in its correctness and completeness. There is no point in the team's trying to collect for itself information that is already available in the institution's written documents.

☐ Team Meetings

The Team Chair should organize each team meeting carefully, deciding in advance what needs to be accomplished. Each meeting will usually include brief reports from team members on the areas they have been examining and discussion of those areas by the entire team.

A major strength of every evaluation is the exchange that goes on within the team's meetings. Team members pool their experiences and resources, stimulate and question one another, search and argue, until points are clear and consensus has been reached. In most cases, the team makes its decisions through such consensus rather than through fiat or majority vote. One reason for having the team lodged in the same place is that proximity facilitates the exchange of ideas, opinions, and information necessary to reach consensus.

The Team Chair should make sure that team meetings run efficiently and end at a reasonable time. A closing hour for evening meetings should be set and honored. At each meeting before the last, the team should review its progress and, if necessary, revise the remainder of its schedule to pursue issues that need further clarification.

At its final meeting, the team seeks agreement on the proposed content of its report and on its formal recommendation. The Team Chair should make clear his/her expectations of team members for the timing and content of the Team Report.

Finally, at the last team meeting the team should prepare for the exit session with the institution's officers. It should agree on the strengths and challenges it wishes to emphasize, on whether the Team Chair or the various team members will present the team's views, and on what its recommendation will be. At this point, if questions are raised about the content of the recommendation or the options available, particularly **if the team is considering imposing a sanction, the Team Chair should call the Commission staff.**

> At any point in these meetings, if team members disagree over matters of Commission policy and practice, the Chair should contact the Commission staff. If they are considering a recommendation that will involve denial of an institution's request or a recommendation of Probation, Evaluation Teams should contact the Commission staff liaison before holding the exit session.

☐ The Minority Report

If one or more team members dissent strongly from the majority opinion, the Team Report must state explicitly that a consensus was not reached. Those who differ from the majority position typically file a Minority Report. The Minority Report is to include the basis for the team members' dissent, the recommendation they would have preferred the team to agree upon, and the rationale for that recommendation. The Minority Report is appended to the Team Report with the names of those filing it.

The Team Chair should consult with the Commission staff when such a situation arises. Additionally, the Team Chair should explain the general content of the Minority Report to the institution's Chief Executive Officer. It is critical during the Exit Session that the Team Chair identify and include the findings and recommendation of the members who prepared the Minority Report as well as those of the majority of the Team.

While current policy does not require a Team Report that includes a Minority Report to be reviewed by a Review Committee, it is unlikely that such a report will pass through a Readers' Panel without referral to a Review Committee for further discussion.

☐ The Exit Session

Before leaving campus, the entire team meets with the Executive Officer, and those the Executive Officer invites, to summarize its findings and to report its recommendation. This exit session should provide the institution with an oral preview of **all the major points** that will appear in the Team Report.

Many Team Chairs find it good practice to call the Commission staff liaison prior to the exit session and discuss the team's findings. This is critical if an adverse recommendation is being considered. It is also good practice to meet with the Executive Officer alone before the exit session to explain briefly the contents of the team's oral report. This is especially important if the team's recommendation clearly will be a disappointment to the institution.

Although it is imperative that both the content and the tone of this oral report be consistent with the written report the institution will receive later, the Team should make clear that its oral recommendation is preliminary in nature. The oral report should leave no doubt about the team's judgments and, after it, the written report should hold no surprises. In most visits, the team will report what its proposed recommendation will be. It should emphasize that if Commission staff review of the draft Team Report raises questions about the appropriateness of the recommendation in relation to established practice and policy or the adequacy of the report's rationale for the recommendation, some modification may be made. The institution will be notified immediately if such questions result in a modification to the Team recommendation. In addition, positive or negative, the recommendation must proceed through the other Commission processes that may or may not alter it.

When the team's oral report is completed, the Executive Officer may raise questions about it. If the Executive Officer or other administrators believe that the team has been misinformed or has misunderstood something important, they should say so; the team should be prepared to double-check if its facts are questioned. However, **both the team and the institution's representatives should avoid turning the exit session into a debate.** The institution will be given an opportunity to file a formal, written response to the final Team Report, and that response is the proper place for challenging the team's interpretations or judgments. Based on the team's presentation in the exit session, the institution should have enough information to begin preparing its written response, even before it receives the final report.

Normally, the team departs directly after the exit session. However, if the exit session raises important, unresolved questions, the team may need to reconvene to reconsider some aspect of its report or recommendation. If necessary, it should take time to clarify its position or make sure of its facts and, in extremely difficult cases, it may be necessary for the team to extend its stay to gather and assess the additional information.

8 The Team Report and Recommendation

AUDIENCES FOR THE TEAM REPORT

The Team Report is intended for a variety of audiences. The most obvious are the Executive Officer, the governing board, and others at the institution, the Commission staff, the Accreditation Review Council members who will take part in the review process, the Commissioners, and members of subsequent Evaluation Teams.

In most Team Reports balance is important, but in certain situations Evaluation Teams might focus the report more clearly toward one audience than another. If the team consciously chooses such a focus, it would be wise to identify in the introduction the audience and the reason for its choice. This clarification is critical for those involved in the Commission review processes who must determine whether the team's recommendations are adequately supported and for the Commissioners who must take final action.

WRITING RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE TEAM REPORT

In writing the Team Report, the Team Chair draws heavily on the comments, ideas, and rough drafts of the team members. Therefore, it is important that members of the team

- understand the nature of the Team Report and provide information useful to its writing,
- submit written contributions to the Team Chair either at the end of the visit or within a week after it,
- read the draft report with care and report to the Team Chair both editing and corrections that should be considered before the final report is written and submitted to the Commission.

Because the Team Chair's report must be consistent with and supportive of the team's recommendation, the draft report should be more than a cut-and-paste amalgamation of team members' drafts. Instead of expecting to see every word he/she provided to the Chair for the report, a team member should review the draft for substance, accuracy, and coherence.

In writing the report, the Team Chair should honestly reflect the views of the Evaluation Team and indicate (without naming individual team members) any significant disagreements within it, should include all major points made in the team's oral report at the exit session, and should convey the team's recommendation and rationale for each aspect of that recommendation.

☐ Advice on Writing Style

The Team Chair composes the Team Report, and is responsible for writing a clear, concise, well-organized, coherent document that will withstand the careful scrutiny of multiple audiences over a long period of time. Rather than repeat the content of the Self-Study Report, the Team Report should provide an analysis that will assist the institution in establishing priorities among possible actions to foster institutional improvement. The tone should be professional, constructive, objective, and civil. Use of the third person will make clear that the Team speaks as a unified, objective entity. The Team Report should focus on the institution, not on individuals. It is important to avoid contradictory statements, prescriptive language, and the use of external standards to justify judgments, as well as the words "minimally met" when referring to either the GIRs or the Criteria for Accreditation.

STRUCTURE OF THE TEAM REPORT

Every Team Report is different because no two institutions are the same. However, since each evaluation is conducted to examine an institution for the same accrediting purposes and in relation to a common set of Criteria, every Team Report must include the following sections:

- ◇ Section I. The Introduction
- ◇ Section II. Evaluation for Affiliation
- ◇ Section III. Strengths and Challenges
- ◇ Section IV: Advice and Suggestions for Institutional Improvement
- ◇ Section V: The Team Recommendation and Rationale

☐ Section I: The Introduction

A clear introduction provides the reader a context within which to read what follows. This introduction includes:

- ◇ the organization of the report;
- ◇ the accreditation history of the institution;
- ◇ the structure and scope of this evaluation visit, including
  - – changes, if any, to the SAS requested by the institution;
  - – locations/instructional sites visited by the team;
- ◇ any comments about the audiences for the report; and
- ◇ evaluation of the utility of the institutional self-study process and Self-Study Report. The team's assessment of the self-study process and report can be useful to others in the Commission's review processes, to subsequent Self-Study Coordinators at the institution, and to Commission staff in the identification of good examples of Self-Study Reports.

It is important that the team briefly review how the evaluation visit was conducted (i.e., people interviewed, documents reviewed, etc.). This need not be an exhaustive list of names or offices, but should give solid evidence that the review was appropriately complete.

The introduction should confirm the scope of the evaluation visit as stated by the last official action of the Commission and as specified on the Evaluation Visit Summary Sheet that the team received before the visit, or explain how the scope was changed.

Some examples:

- ◇ *"This is the report of a comprehensive evaluation for continued accreditation at the master's degree-granting level that was conducted for the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education on (dates of the visit). During the visit the institution asked that its accreditation be extended to include a new program at a higher degree level."*
- ◇ *"This is a report of a focused visit held at the request of the institution to extend accreditation to include a new branch campus."*

Section II: Evaluation for Affiliation

Every Team Report for candidacy or accreditation must contain an explicit evaluation of whether the institution fulfills the criteria for the status sought. There is no prescribed format for the organization of this part of the report. Because this section of the report is crucial to the Commission's decision-making processes after the evaluation visit, it must clearly and thoroughly justify the team's recommendation.

- **Institutional response to previous concerns/challenges.** The current Evaluation Team takes into consideration the nature of the previous Team's concerns and the documentation provided by the institution of how it has addressed those concerns. Concerns identified by the Commission may be found in documents sent to the Team by the Commission before the visit. These may include staff analyses of institutional progress, monitoring, or contingency reports; Assessment Plan Review panel reports; Team Reports for focused visits; and the last comprehensive Team Report.

- **The General Institutional Requirements (GIRs).** The institution's Self-Study Report should document how the institution meets the GIRs. If the Evaluation Team finds that meeting the GIRs is sufficiently well-documented in the Self-Study Report, it need only note that conclusion in the Team Report, and refer to the section(s) of the Self-Study Report where details can be found. If, however, the team finds deficiencies with respect to one or more of the GIRs, it must discuss these in the Team Report and reflect its findings in the Recommendation and Rationale sections of the report.

Explicit commentary on each of the GIRs is required in Team Reports involving evaluations for initial and continued candidacy, initial accreditation, and those involving recommendations for probation or withdrawal of status.

- **The Criteria for Accreditation.** Chapter 4 suggests the areas the team needs to examine to ensure that an institution's patterns of evidence sufficiently support its claim that it fulfills the Criteria. Like the Self-Study Report, the Team Report needs to be evaluative, not merely descriptive. In documenting in the Team Report that an institution does or does not satisfy the Criteria for Accreditation, the team need not repeat all of the information contained in the institution's Self-Study Report, catalogs, and other materials. In some cases, the team will need to provide extended discussion and documentation to support its conclusions; in others, it can refer readers to other institutional documents and summarize what can be found there. In other words, the Team Report need not be a totally self-contained document, but it must summarize clearly the evidence supporting the team's judgments about every part of the Criteria.

- **The Candidacy Program.** Chapter 13 outlines the need for the team to examine both the institution's current patterns of evidence and its plans for strengthening those patterns. In documenting that an institution fulfills the requirements of the Candidacy Program, the Team Report should follow the same guidelines provided above on the Criteria for Accreditation.

- **Institutional compliance with the Higher Education Reauthorization Act.** The team should specifically address institutional compliance with Federal requirements regarding credits, program length, tuition, professional accreditation, dual institutional accreditation, and advertising and recruitment materials. (For additional information on the Commission's Federal Compliance Program, see Chapters 5, 14, and 15.)

Section III: Strengths and Challenges

The team should attempt to summarize the most salient, distinguishing strengths and challenges. This section should not provide new information but should summarize information provided elsewhere in the team's evaluative narrative. "Strengths" are emphasized both to commend the institution for them and to encourage

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it to maintain them. "Challenges" are emphasized to indicate those areas that require special attention either immediately or in the near future. This is not the place for a long, exhaustive list of every good point and every challenge the team discovered. Such information is not useful to the institution in establishing priorities for action. Moreover, strengths and challenges should be sufficiently precise to be useful to the institution as a basis for action.

It is important that there be consistency between the summary of strengths and challenges and the team recommendation. The institution will report its progress in addressing challenges identified in its next Self-Study Report.

Examples of statements of strengths:

- The University has revised its statement of mission and purposes to reflect the reality of its location in an expanded metropolitan area, its potential for development and contributions to its service area, and its responsibility for reflecting in the composition of its faculty and student body and its programs the diverse cultures and ethnic make-up of the metropolitan area it serves.

- The Team is impressed with the financial viability of the College. A stable enrollment, careful financial planning, prudent investment, a record of good annual gift income, and effective fundraising have placed the College in a strong financial position.

Examples of statements of challenges:

- While the College is appropriately managing the funds available to it, shortages of resources are apparent throughout the institution, especially in the areas of faculty and staff salaries and budgets available to academic units.

- The Team is concerned that a substantial level of mutual distrust appears to exist between the Board of Regents and the faculty. The Board needs to recognize and honor the role of the faculty in overseeing curricular quality, while the faculty needs to accept the Board's responsibility to assure the institution's financial health.

☐ Section IV: Advice and Suggestions for Institutional Improvement

Because the Commission's mission is also to encourage institutional improvement, Evaluation Teams offer suggestions to institutions as well as evaluate them. A section devoted to observations and suggestions is an essential part of the Team Report.

- Suggestions should be differentiated from the team's evaluation of the institution relative to the Criteria.

- The report should state explicitly that the section is **advisory** and that making changes or improvements mentioned is not a requirement of the institution's candidacy or accreditation.

- Challenges that affect the institution's ability to fulfill the General Institutional Requirements or the Criteria belong in Section III. Suggested ways to resolve those and other unrelated challenges belong in Section IV.

As experienced educators, team members can offer valuable counsel to an institution. As outsiders they can bring an objective perspective to bear on a difficulty that the institution has not been able to clarify for itself. Teams are encouraged to offer this counsel and perspective whenever they can and to keep this section of the Team Report in mind during their meetings on campus.

A team's suggestions vary with the institution and with the type of comprehensive evaluation it has been asked to conduct. Few fixed rules can be provided by the Commission for what should be included in this section. However, the Commission does recommend the following guidelines.

- ◇ Raise issues directly. For example:

  > *"The organizational structure of the institution does not provide for effective administrative management."*

- ◇ Make clear suggestions for change. For example:

  > *"We suggest that the college's organizational plan place explicit responsibility for day-to-day decisions with the line officers, and that the president should review each month the effects of those decisions."*

- ◇ Observations and suggestions should not identify personalities within the institution, even when the observations are laudatory. For example, it would be inappropriate to say:

  > *"The president's administrative style is interesting and unconventional."* or *"The Dean of Students is doing an excellent job."*

- ◇ Teams should be wary of characterizing the way various persons get along with each other. The short duration of the visit cannot provide the team with adequate knowledge of the activities of most individuals within the institution, so it is better to relate observations and suggestions to organizational elements within the institution. For example, it would be better to say:

  > *"There appears to be a good rapport between student leaders and the office of the Dean of Students."*

  than:

  > *"The Dean of Students and the President of the Student Body talk freely and frequently with one another."*

- ◇ Suggest, rather than prescribe, specific solutions to problems. Specific prescriptions are often confused, by institutions and readers, with accreditation requirements. For example, avoid language such as:

  > *"The student personnel office is overworked, and an Associate Dean of Students must be appointed immediately."*

- ◇ Do not direct the institution to meet standards or guidelines of other agencies. For example, do not suggest that:

  > *"the College should seek NCATE accreditation."*

  However, it is appropriate to point out that the lack of specialized accreditation may handicap graduates.

- ■ **A note about special emphases visits.** If an institution chooses to build its self-study around special emphases, the team should note that in the introduction to the Team Report and speak directly to those topics in the body of the Team Report. In such cases, the observations and suggestions section of the Team Report may be more pointed and specific than usually recommended, because the institution, in choosing to emphasize special topics, has sought a response to and analysis of what was accomplished. However, it is still important that the Team Report distinguishes between the bases for the accrediting recommendation and the consulting advice sought by the institution. Special emphases visits are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

☐ Section V: The Team Recommendation and Rationale

The final section of the Team Report should have three related parts: a brief, standard recommendation sentence; a rationale; and a Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status. **This section of the report should begin on a new page to facilitate its inclusion in later stages of the evaluation process requiring written documentation.**

- **The recommendation sentence.** The recommendation sentence begins the final section of the Team Report. The recommendation sentence for a comprehensive evaluation should follow one of two models.

  A positive recommendation sentence should read:

  > *"The team's recommendations for action, including its recommendation to (grant/continue) the (candidacy/accreditation) of College X, are shown on the attached Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status. The team's reasons for its recommendations are:"*

  A negative recommendation sentence should read:

  > *"The team recommends that the (candidacy/accreditation) of College X be (denied/withdrawn) for the following reasons:"*

- **The rationale.** The recommendation sentence is to be followed by a section in which the Evaluation Team clearly states its reasons, its judgments, and its specific recommendations. It is essential that the tone and content of this section be consistent with the tone and content of the overall report and that the team's recommendation be substantiated as part of the analysis developed in Section II of the report. The rationale should provide clear, well-supported reasons for any focused evaluations or reports that are required as well as the recommended timing of the next comprehensive evaluation.

  For example:

  > The team recommends that the College submit a monitoring report on institutional planning by November 1, 2001. The College lacks a planning process and strategic plan that are useful in guiding decision-makers. The College should submit its Board approved strategic plan. If the College does not document that the planning process has been formalized, has been implemented, and has been linked to the budget process, then the Team recommends that a focused visit on planning be scheduled within six months.
  >
  > The team recommends a focused visit in 1998-99 on development of the university's off-campus site. No constituency could articulate a direction or purpose for the branch campus. Current use of the branch campus is inefficient and only marginally effective, being neither a residential, commuter, nor conference campus. The University needs to determine an operational focus for its branch campus and make an institutional commitment to that focus.

  The Commission's subsequent decision-making processes rely heavily on this section, either as a part of the Team Report or as a stand-alone document. Therefore, it is critical that the rationale, even at the risk of repeating previous portions of the report, summarizes the team's reasons for all components of its recommendation. Usually the team can provide an adequate rationale for its recommendation in two or three pages.

- **Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status (SAS).** The SAS Worksheet summarizes the team's recommendation. It plays a critical role in the evaluation process, conveying team, and in some cases Review Committee, recommendations to the Commission for final action. Because of the critical nature of the Worksheet, it is important that the Team Chair consult with the staff liaison to ensure that the wording is clear for the processes that follow and for others who may view it in the future. Detailed information on the sections of the SAS is provided in the following section.

- **Statement of Institutional Scope and Activities (SISA).** The information contained in the SISA section of the Record of Status and Scope (RSS) is updated at least annually through the Institutional Annual Report process; changes are made between reporting periods as needed. The team will not include in its report any recommendations about the SISA. The team will need to confirm that the information contained in the SISA is accurate: legal status, affiliation, undergraduate and graduate enrollments, number of degree programs, full service degree sites other than the home campus, other degree sites, course sites, and other program features. The Commission provides the Team Chair with a form for this purpose. In addition to verifying current activities, it is important to note that some institutional requests for changes may affect either or both of the sections of the RSS.

☐ The Role of the RSS in the Evaluation Process

Evaluation Teams and Review Committees use the SAS Worksheet to record their recommendations about the institution's future relationship with the Commission. The SAS Worksheet serves as the primary document of the evaluation process for the Commission when it takes final action. In taking its action, the Commission approves a new SAS for the institution. The Evaluation Team also confirms the contents of the SISA or makes appropriate corrections on it.

The Evaluation Team or the Review Committee indicates its recommendation by specifying the suggested wording for each section of the SAS. If it recommends a change in the current wording, it specifies that change, using the wording discussed below, in the space provided on the SAS Worksheet. If it recommends no change in the current wording, it indicates that in the appropriate space by writing *"Retain Original Wording."*

- **Highest degree awarded.** This section will change only if the institution has requested a change as part of the evaluation.

- **Status.** The Evaluation Team must decide whether the institution should be granted or continued in candidacy or accreditation status. (Note: This section may be altered by a focused visit team only if Probation is being recommended.)

  The Evaluation Team may make one of these possible recommendations concerning the institution's status:

  - ◇ **that candidacy or accreditation be granted or continued.** The team recommends that candidacy or accreditation be granted or continued if it finds, and the second section of its report documents, that the institution meets the General Institutional Requirements and the Criteria for Accreditation or the expectations of the Candidacy Program.

  - ◇ **that the institution be placed on Probation.** The team recommends that accreditation be continued with Probation if it finds, and the second section of its report documents, that while the institution currently meets the General Institutional Requirements and the Criteria for Accreditation, specific and vital changes are necessary for it to continue to meet them. (The Commission's Probation policy is discussed in Chapter 2.) The team summarizes, within the rationale section of its report, its reasons for this recommendation by detailing the challenges that need to be ameliorated. It records its recommendation on the SAS Worksheet by:

        - adding "on Probation" to the Status section and
        - setting the date in the "Next comprehensive evaluation" section. In addition, it is in the "Next comprehensive evaluation" section that the team summarizes the specific conditions that led to the Probation and the expected evidence the institution must provide to show appropriate progress toward ameliorating these conditions at the time of the comprehensive evaluation.
    - **that accreditation be denied but candidacy be continued.** The team recommends that accreditation be denied but candidacy be continued if it finds, and the second section of its report documents, that an institution applying for accreditation before the end of its four-year candidacy period does not meet one or more of the Criteria for Accreditation but continues to meet the General Institutional Requirements and the expectations of the Candidacy Program. The team summarizes its reasons for this recommendation in the rationale section of its report. The team's recommendation that the institution's candidacy should remain the same is reflected on the SAS Worksheet by specifying *"Candidate"* in the Status section. (In exceptional cases, the team may choose to recommend that an institution applying for accreditation at the end of its candidacy period be denied accreditation but that its candidacy be extended for no longer than one year.)
    - **that candidacy or accreditation be denied or withdrawn.** The team recommends that candidacy or accreditation be denied or withdrawn if it finds, and the second section of its report documents, that the institution does not meet one or more of the General Institutional Requirements and/or one or more of the Criteria for Accreditation, or fails to fulfill the expectations of the Candidacy Program. In this case, the team is recommending that the institution be denied initial affiliation or that continued affiliation be withdrawn and, therefore, that the institution no longer have a Statement of Affiliation Status. Should the team make this determination, its reasons for this recommendation will be explained in the rationale section of its report. It will indicate *"None"* in the Status section of the SAS Worksheet and *"Not applicable"* in every other section.

- **Most recent action.** The Commission staff will automatically change this date as the result of each action, whether it be action taken by the Commission or by the staff.
- **Stipulations.** Stipulations place limits on the development of new activities or new programs, including limits on the size, extent, or location of certain of the institution's activities. In some cases, the stipulations may restrict both program offerings and off-campus sites. The team may recommend any stipulations that it decides are warranted. To change a stipulation, the institution must implement the Commission's procedures for institutional change. The team summarizes its reasons for these recommendations in the rationale section of its report and notes them on the SAS Worksheet.

    Some examples:

    - A stipulation limiting educational programs: *"Accreditation at the master's degree level is limited to the Master of Business Administration degree program."*
    - A stipulation limiting locations: *"The College will open no new instructional sites out of state without prior Commission approval."*
    - A stipulation limiting off-campus sites and programs at the sites: *"Out of state offerings are limited to the Master of Business Administration degree program offered in Dubuque, Iowa."*
    - A stipulation limiting international sites and programs at the sites: *"International offerings are limited to the Associate of Arts degree program offered at the current site in Tokyo, Japan."*

- **New degree sites.** If the team wants to recommend that the institution be exempted from the specific Commission policy on institutional change related to opening and closing sites at which degree programs are offered, it notes the exemption in this part of the SAS. In determining whether to place anything in this section, the team should do the following.
  - ◇ Determine whether flexible initiation and contraction of such sites are in keeping with the institution's mission and purposes.
  - ◇ Review written institutional strategic and long-range plans.
  - ◇ Study carefully the administrative structures in place to assure the quality of extended offerings.
  - ◇ Discuss with the administration and governing board anticipated and planned institutional changes.

If the team concludes that an institution should be exempted from the Commission's policies that require prior approval for opening new sites at which degree programs will be provided, it will use these words:

> *"No prior Commission approval required for offering existing degree programs at new sites ...."*

The team must identify specifically the geographical range of that exemption, e.g. *"within the state."* The Commission will monitor these changes through the Institutional Annual Report (see Chapter 2) through which the institution discloses all off-campus operations.

Some examples:

- ◇ A broadly generic exemption: A public university by state mandate delivers a variety of degree programs at various sites throughout the state. The sites might open and close depending on need. The team concludes that the university has strong oversight structures to assure the quality of instruction: *"No prior Commission approval required for offering existing degree programs at new sites throughout the state (district, service area)."*
- ◇ A specific exemption: A private church-related college offers a strong off-campus degree completion program and seeks authorization to offer that program throughout a five-state area. The team concludes that the college has tested processes through which it can assure the quality of this program: *"No prior Commission approval required for offering the existing degree completion program at new sites in Arizona, Colorado, Texas, New Mexico, and Oklahoma."*
- ◇ A specific exemption: A comprehensive community college has a proven history of contracting with the military for delivery of a variety of educational programs. The team concludes that the effectiveness of the college's administrative structures are so well-tested that the institution should be free to contract anywhere the military has an established presence: *"No prior Commission approval required for offering existing degree programs on military bases anywhere in the world."*

If the Evaluation Team determines that this exemption is not appropriate, it should enter

> *"Prior Commission approval required."*

The institution then must follow all appropriate Commission policies regarding institutional change (see Chapter 12).

The team should make clear at the exit session the implications of its recommendations in regard to new degree sites.

- **Progress reports required.** The Evaluation Team may recommend that the institution be required to file progress reports between comprehensive evaluations with the office of the Commission. The team should ask for a progress report when its goal is that the Commission receive specific, important information from the institution, monitor how an institution is progressing in coping with certain changes or challenges, or receive evidence that institutional plans came to fruition as expected by the institution and the team.

In deciding to require progress reports, the team respects the following guidelines.

  - ◇ The topic(s) to be addressed in a report are clear, specific, and preferably no more than three in number.
  - ◇ The subject(s) of the report(s) can be evaluated on the basis of written materials alone and do not require an evaluation visit for verification.
  - ◇ A specific date on which the report is to be filed is indicated in the recommendation.

The team specifies, in the rationale section of its report, the specific nature of the progress report(s) and provides all specific comments related to the report(s), including the documentation and/or evidence it expects the institution to provide. On the SAS, the team enters the date of the report and a brief listing of the topic(s) to be addressed:

"A report by (day/month/year) on (topic[s])."

- **Monitoring reports required.** The team may recommend that the institution be required to file monitoring reports with the office of the Commission between evaluations. The team recommends a monitoring report in situations requiring careful ongoing attention. They signal that the situation should change, or the Commission staff must determine whether a focused evaluation should be conducted (or some other form of monitoring), or that the date of the next comprehensive evaluation should be moved forward. It is especially important with a monitoring report that the team specify how the report should be used. It may wish to indicate in its rationale, for example, that a report should be filed on a certain date and that *"unless the report shows … then … ."* The team should explain the basis for evaluating the report and the actions that the report should trigger.

In requiring monitoring reports, the team respects the following guidelines.

  - ◇ The topic(s) to be addressed in a report are clear, specific, and significantly important to require prompt monitoring.
  - ◇ The subject(s) of the report(s) are able to be evaluated on the basis of written materials alone and do not require an evaluation visit for verification.
  - ◇ A specific date on which the report is to be filed is indicated in the recommendation.
  - ◇ The report(s) are to be filed within three years of the evaluation visit.

The team specifies, in the rationale section of its report, the specific nature of the monitoring report(s) and provides all specific comments related to the report(s).

For example:

  - ◇ Enrollment trends are declining, leading to yearly deficits. The College must either recruit, admit, and retain more students or find new sources of income. With no endowment, this institution cannot continue much longer to tolerate these shortfalls. If within the next three years the institution cannot show a growing enrollment and an end to yearly deficits, then the Commission should conduct a focused visit.

On the SAS, the team enters the date of the report and a brief listing of the topic(s) to be addressed:

> *"A report by (day/month/year) on enrollments and development efforts."*

- **Contingency reports required.** In the event that changes occur in conditions that have a significant effect on the institution, the team may recommend that the institution be required to file contingency reports between evaluations with the office of the Commission. In requiring contingency reports, the team and the Commission specify why the change requires close monitoring, exactly which conditions require the institution to file the report, and what issues the staff should consider when the report is received. A recommendation for a contingency report might read:

> *"A report if the legislature changes the funding formula."*

- **Other visits required.** The team may recommend that one or more focused evaluations be conducted before the next comprehensive evaluation if it finds and documents that such evaluations are warranted. If it decides that a focused evaluation is necessary, the subject(s) of the focused evaluation(s) must be specific, clear, and limited in number. The team specifies in the rationale section of its report the specific nature of the focused visit and provides there all specific comments including a rationale for each topic included in the visit. On the SAS, the team enters the date of the visit and a brief listing of the topic(s) to be covered in the visit:

> *"Visit in (academic year) focused on (topic[s])."*

- **Next comprehensive evaluation.** The team must recommend a time for the next comprehensive evaluation. Commission policy requires that a comprehensive evaluation be scheduled no later than five years after an institution is granted initial accreditation, and that every institution affiliated with the Commission undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least every ten years. Candidate institutions must be evaluated biennially during their candidacy period.

  The team is required to provide a concise and convincing explanation for its recommendation concerning the timing of the comprehensive evaluation in the rationale section of the Team Report. When making its decision about the timing of the next comprehensive evaluation, the team should consider the following questions.

  - ◇ When should the Commission next review the accreditability of the institution?
  - ◇ What compelling factors exist to indicate that the institution should undergo a comprehensive evaluation in less than ten years?

  If the institution is experiencing some significant problems that need immediate attention, a comprehensive evaluation probably should be called for within the next five years. If, however, the institution is basically sound, but faces the same uncertainties confronted by most institutions, the decennial cycle is probably most appropriate. Increasingly, Evaluation Teams place comprehensive evaluations on the decennial cycle and use reports or focused visits to provide Commission monitoring of specific areas.

  In addition, teams should keep in mind that, while most comprehensive evaluations are scheduled for fixed times, the Commission reserves the right to reschedule the time of the next evaluation visit for an earlier date or to call for a report or a focused evaluation to respond to changes that occur within an institution.

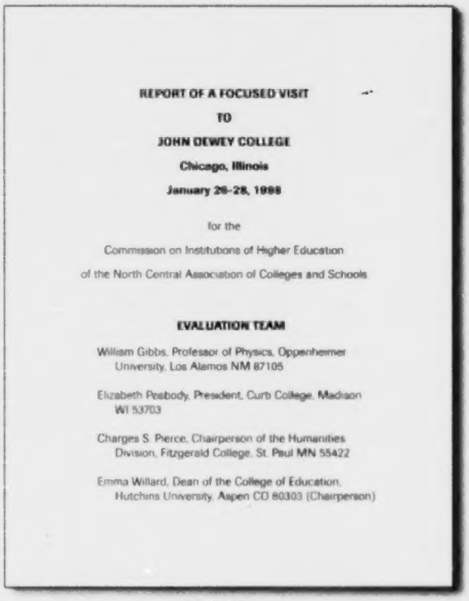
PREPARING AND SUBMITTING THE TEAM REPORT

☐ The Draft Team Report

After receiving materials from the team, the Team Chair completes a draft of the report. To assure that the decision-making schedule of the Commission is maintained, the preliminary draft should be completed within four weeks of the evaluation visit.

- **The Format of the Team Report.** The Team Report should follow these format guidelines:
  - ◇ The report should be
    - ○ typed or laser printed,
    - ○ double-spaced,
    - ○ single-sided,
    - ○ on 8½" x 11" paper. (Use only printers that provide letter quality print that will produce clear, readable photocopies.)
  - ◇ The title page should follow the format of the sample shown. For the draft Team Report, clearly place these words on the top of the title page:

    "Draft for correction of errors of fact only–for internal distribution at the discretion of the Executive Officer."
  - ◇ Include a Table of Contents.
  - ◇ Use page headers–place the name of the institution on the top of each page flush left.
  - ◇ Number each page at the top flush right.
  - ◇ Allow at least 1" left-hand margins (wide enough to allow the report to be placed in a binder).



REPORT OF A FOCUSED VISIT
TO
JOHN DEWEY COLLEGE
Chicago, Illinois
January 26-28, 1998

for the
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

EVALUATION TEAM

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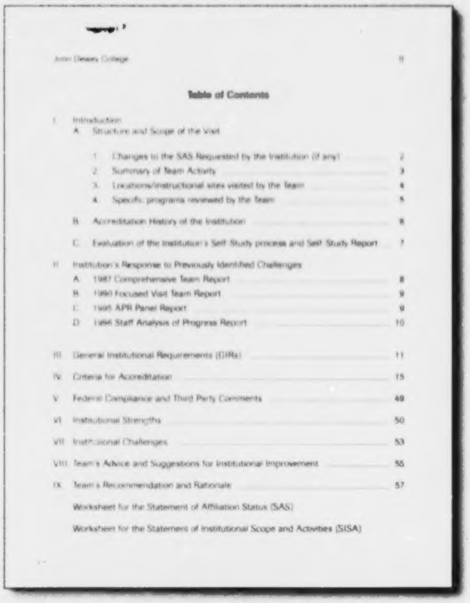
Title Page



John Dewey College ii

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- **Distribution of the Draft Team Report.** No more than four weeks after the visit, the Team Chair should send the draft Team Report to the Commission staff liaison and the Team members. The Team and staff liaison will review the report and within a week discuss it with the Team Chair. Infrequently, the discussion between the staff liaison and the Team Chair may result in modification of the preliminary recommendation shared at the exit session. If that should occur, the Chair will notify the institution and the team immediately. Six weeks after the visit, the Team Chair sends the draft Team Report to the institution for review and correction of errors of fact.

- **Response to the Draft Team Report.** In the letter that accompanies the draft report, the Team Chair should set firm deadlines for response. Unless notified by any of the parties, the Chair should assume when the deadline arrives that the final report can be produced and submitted to the Commission. The final report must be submitted to the Commission office no later than nine weeks after the team visit. As with the Commission staff comments, if comments from the Executive Officer or individual team members suggest substantive changes in the draft, the Team Chair may need to confer by telephone with team members before preparing the final version.

☐ The Final Team Report

When the final report is complete, the Team Chair sends it to the Commission staff liaison. **The final Team Report is due in the office of the Commission no later than nine weeks after the evaluation visit.**

The final Team Report, in original type with the SAS Worksheet attached, becomes the official document of reference. The Commission staff will retype the SAS Worksheet recommendations for the final report. Because Commission processes often require multiple copies, the clear original must be kept in the Commission files.

The Commission office duplicates the final report and mails four copies of it to the Executive Officer. The CEO distributes copies of the report to its board chair and others. The Commission office also distributes copies of the report to each team member and, at the appropriate time, to the evaluators involved in the Commission's review process.

9

Review Processes and Commission Action

REVIEW PROCESSES LEADING TO COMMISSION ACTION

The evaluation process includes three steps to ensure the appropriateness of the final action.

- The first step is the evaluation of the institution by an Evaluation Team.
- The second step is the review of the documents relating to the evaluation visit through one of two review processes, a **Readers' Panel** or a **Review Committee.** In most evaluations, the institution chooses which of these two review processes it prefers in its official response to the Team Report.
- The third step is final review and action by the members of the Commission.

☐ Institutional Response to the Team Report

After reviewing the Team Report, including the Evaluation Team's recommendation, the Executive Officer of the institution sends a formal written response to the Commission with copies to the Team Chair and each team member. The Institutional Response

- provides the institution's commentary on the team's findings and becomes an integral part of subsequent review processes, including the next evaluation;
- becomes part of the official record of the evaluation;
- identifies the institution's choice of review process for evaluations for continued candidacy, continued accreditation, and focused visits.

The institution must send its response to the Commission and members of the team **within two weeks of receipt of the final Team Report.** The institution should notify its Commission staff liaison if it expects any delay in submitting the response. However, **the Commission will not postpone its regularly scheduled processes and will move forward with an appropriate process if the institution fails to submit a response within a reasonable period of time.** The Institutional Response is sent by the institution to all members of the Readers' Panel and/or Review Committee, as appropriate.

☐ Choosing the Appropriate Review Process

The Commission has established two processes for review of institutional evaluations: the Readers' Panel process and the Review Committee process.

- **Institutions required to be reviewed by a Review Committee.** Institutions undergoing evaluation for initial candidacy or initial accreditation and institutions whose team recommendations include the addition or removal of Probation or withdrawal of affiliation, must be reviewed by a Review Committee. Review Committees also consider team recommendations found unacceptable to a particular institution and team recommendations forwarded by the Readers' Panel Process or by the Commission.
- **Institutions eligible to choose the type of review process.** Institutions undergoing evaluation for continued candidacy or continued accreditation as well as those undergoing focused evaluation are eligible to choose the process they prefer.

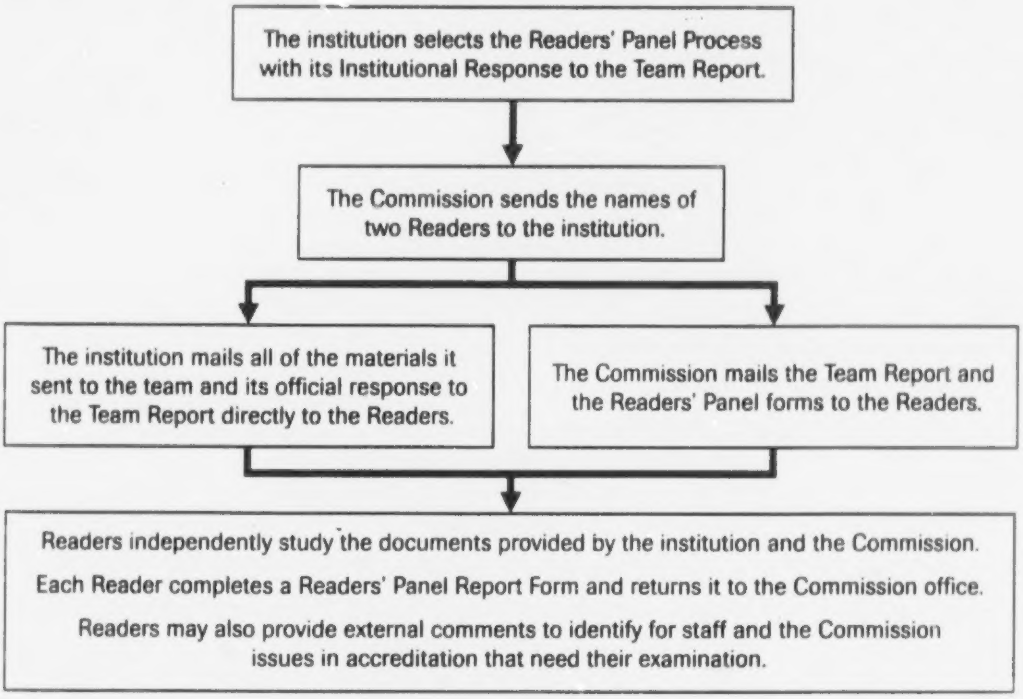
◇ If the institution determines it is in essential agreement with the team's recommendation, then requesting review by a Readers' Panel is appropriate.

◇ If the institution disagrees with the team recommendation, it should ask to be reviewed by a Review Committee. In considering whether to choose the Review Committee process, the institution should understand that Review Committees cannot alter Team Reports; they can recommend altering the team recommendation. Final judgment of whether the team recommendation is sustained or modified rests with the Commission.

The institution should be aware that the Review Committee is not limited to the area that the institution wants to challenge, and can revise recommendations in any direction and about any aspect of the SAS it believes appropriate.

☐ The Readers' Panel Process

A Readers' Panel consists of two members of the Accreditation Review Council (see Chapter 6).



The institution selects the Readers' Panel Process with its Institutional Response to the Team Report.

The Commission sends the names of two Readers to the institution.

The institution mails all of the materials it sent to the team and its official response to the Team Report directly to the Readers.

The Commission mails the Team Report and the Readers' Panel forms to the Readers.

Readers independently study the documents provided by the institution and the Commission.

Each Reader completes a Readers' Panel Report Form and returns it to the Commission office.

Readers may also provide external comments to identify for staff and the Commission issues in accreditation that need their examination.

The Readers' Panel may make one of the following three recommendations.

◇ **Forward the recommendation to the Commission without modification.** The Readers' Panel makes this recommendation if both Readers find that the team's recommendation is appropriate as presented in the Team Report. The institution and the Team Chair are informed of the Readers' recommendation.

◇ **Forward the recommendation with minor modifications.** Readers may recommend specific **minor** modifications that they believe will strengthen the team's recommendation. In making these recommendations, Readers indicate on the Readers' Panel Report Form the nature of and rationale for each suggested modification, keeping in mind that their comments will form the basis for discussion by a Review Committee if the institution refuses to accept the suggested modifications. If one or both Readers make such recommendations, the Commission staff conducts a conference call with the Readers to discuss the modifications. (This option is not intended to promote back-and-forth negotiation between the Readers and the institution; **under no circumstances will the Readers communicate with either the team or the institution.**)

  - If the Readers cannot agree on proposed modifications, the team's original recommendation is forwarded to the Commission. The institution and the Team Chair are informed of the Readers' recommendation.

  - If both Readers agree on revised language, the Commission staff liaison formally proposes the modification(s) to the institution. If the institution concurs with the modification(s), the institution and Team Chair are informed of the Readers' recommendations, and the revised recommendation is forwarded to the Commission.

    However, if the institution does not agree with the Readers' proposed modifications to the team recommendation, then the Readers' forms and the staff summary of Reader recommended change(s) are forwarded to the next regularly-scheduled Review Committee. The institution and Team Chair are informed and invited to appear before the Review Committee.

- **Forward the recommendation to a Review Committee for further consideration.** The Readers' Panel recommends further consideration if both Readers find that review by a Review Committee is likely to lead to alteration of the team's recommendation. The Readers identify on the Reader form any aspects of the team's recommendation that deserve special attention by the Review Committee, specifying in detail the related issues that should be explored further. The institution and Team Chair are informed and invited to appear before the next regularly scheduled Review Committee.

The Review Committee Process

Review Committees are composed of at least seven Consultant-Evaluators, most of whom are current Accreditation Review Council members. Review Committee members are appointed in accordance with the same general guidelines on conflict of interest that govern appointment of team members. Each year the Commission holds three Review Committee meetings at which several Committees meet simultaneously. Each individual Committee is likely to review two or more institutions in separate sessions.

- The Commission informs the institution of the date of the next Review Committee in the letter with the Team Report, in the letter transmitting the Readers' Panel recommendation, or in the Commission action letter.

- Several weeks before the meeting, the Commission sends to the institution the names of the members of the Review Committee and instructions for the Review Committee process.

- **Immediately upon receipt of this information, the institution sends** to the members of the Review Committee **the same materials** it sent to the Evaluation Team, together with its official response to the Team Report and, when appropriate, its response to the Readers' Panel or the Commission. **The institution's response to the Team Report and the Readers' Panel should also be sent to the Team Chair.** Materials should be sent **by first class, express, or overnight mail** to ensure Review Committee members and the Team Chair adequate preparation time before the meeting.

- ◊ At the same time that it sends the Review Committee roster and instructions to the institution, the Commission also sends to the members of the Review Committee the Team Report and, when appropriate, the Readers' Panel forms or Commission rationale for seeking a Review Committee. The Readers' Panel forms or Commission rationale are also sent to the Team Chair.

The Team Chair and the Executive Officer of the institution appear before the Committee to discuss the institution's materials, the evaluation visit, and the Team Report and recommendation. (In unusual situations, the Evaluation Team may be represented by a member other than the Chair; the institution also may be represented by a person other than the Executive Officer). The Executive Officer may choose to be accompanied by other people representing the institution (e.g., Chief Academic Officer, Chair of the Board, Chief Financial Officer, chair of a specific department, Student Affairs Officer) to whom the Executive Officer can refer specific questions.

The institution and the Team Chair have an opportunity to make brief oral presentations and then to answer the questions of the Review Committee members. **Audio-visual presentations are not permitted, nor may the institution provide extra written materials at the meeting.**

The Review Committee considers, in closed session, the information it has gained and crafts a recommendation and rationale that usually are shared with the institution and the Team Chair at the end of the meeting.

The Review Committee forwards a recommendation to the Commission; that recommendation may be the one made by the team, a minor modification of that recommendation, or a recommendation significantly different from it. The Review Committee may also provide external comments to identify for staff and the Commission issues in accreditation that need their examination.

☐ Institution and Team Response to the Review Committee Recommendations

The Commission office forwards to the institution and to the Team Chair the formal Review Committee recommendation. Both are invited either to indicate support of the recommendation or to file a written response that describes their disagreement, providing, if desired, extra written evidence to support the grounds on which their objections rest. All responses become part of the record of the evaluation and are provided to the Commission for its consideration in taking the final action.

COMMISSION ACTION

The Commission uses a variety of methods to review the recommendations that come before it. Most team recommendations that receive approval by the Readers' Process are reviewed by the Commission's Committee on Institutional Actions; all Evaluation Team and Review Committee recommendations concerning initial candidacy, initial accreditation, Probation, or withdrawal of status are reviewed by the Commission sitting as a Committee of the Whole. Individual Commissioners may be asked to provide analyses to assist the Commission in considering the issues in a particular case. All Commissioners vote on all institutional actions whether the actions are taken at a scheduled meeting, or between meetings through teleconference or through mail review and balloting.

The Commission has defined with precision certain parameters within which it must make its decisions.

> The Commission may accept, modify, or reject a recommendation from staff, from an Evaluators' Panel, and from either an Evaluation Team or a Review Committee when those recommendations on the same institution differ substantially.

The Commission, for clearly specified reasons, may refer to a Review Committee for reconsideration a recommendation from an Evaluation Team that received Reader Panel approval or a recommendation from an Evaluation Team that was unchanged by a Review Committee.

The Commission may propose to modify or reject a recommendation concerning initial candidacy, initial accreditation, and withdrawal of affiliation even when the Evaluation Team and Review Committee concur in that recommendation. The Commissioners' proposed action together with the clearly specified reasons for it are provided by the Executive Director to the institution, the Team Chair and, when appropriate, the Chair of the Review Committee. These parties are asked to respond within 30 days. No later than 30 days after the deadline for responses, the Commissioners review the responses and take action, either at a regularly scheduled meeting or at a special meeting (including a meeting conducted by teleconference).

The Commissioners provide an institution with clearly specified reasons for an action that denies affiliation to it or withdraws affiliation from it.

☐ Commission Action Letter

A letter from the Executive Director of the Commission, accompanied by a revised Statement of Affiliation Status and Record of Status and Scope, to the Chief Executive Officer provides formal notification to the institution of the Commission's action. If the Commission acts to invoke Probation or to deny or withdraw accreditation or candidacy, the formal notification sets forth the Commission's reasons for the action. Because the governing board is the group legally responsible for the institution, the Commission sends a copy of the action letter to the institution's Board Chair.

10 The Evaluation Process: Charts, Timelines, and Samples

AN OVERVIEW OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The Commission's process of evaluation for both initial and continued candidacy or accreditation determines whether an institution meets the General Institutional Requirements and the Criteria for Accreditation. The Commission makes this determination through an evaluation that is **comprehensive** in scope. In some cases, evaluations for continued accreditation may include special emphases but, in general, comprehensive evaluations examine functions and operations of the whole institution in light of the appropriate Criteria. They result in recommendations and Commission actions concerning:

- ◇ whether an institution should be granted initial or continued candidacy or accreditation;
- ◇ whether candidacy or accreditation should be accompanied by any stipulations (e.g., that the institution's accreditation or candidacy be limited to offering only certain degrees);
- ◇ whether any reports should be filed and/or focused evaluations should be conducted before the next comprehensive evaluation; and
- ◇ when the next comprehensive evaluation should be conducted.

☐ Initiating the Evaluation Process

Institutions currently affiliated with the Commission are scheduled for evaluation by previous Commission action. Approximately two years before that scheduled evaluation, the Commission staff liaison sends the Executive Officer a reminder letter about the forthcoming evaluation visit. In response, the Executive Officer:

- ◇ confirms or requests changes in the Statement of Affiliation Status (SAS);
- ◇ names the institution's Self-Study Coordinator;
- ◇ provides three possible dates for the evaluation visit.

At this time, the institution begins to develop both for itself and the Commission a plan for its self-study process that briefly describes the study's design, strategies, and timetable.

One year before the evaluation visit, the institution receives another reminder letter. In response, the Executive Officer confirms the time and purpose of the scheduled visit and indicates the competencies the institution would like to see represented in the Evaluation Team. Focused evaluations called for by previous Commission actions follow this same procedure.

Paper at this stage of the process: Two-year and one-year reminder letters from the Commission, forms for responses from institutions, and SAS. Basic Institutional Data Forms are sent with one-year reminder letters. They are also available on the Commission's Web site.

☐ Selecting the Dates for the Evaluation Visit

The reply form that accompanies the two-year reminder letter asks the institution to identify three sets of preferred specific dates for the visit. The Commission tries to accommodate the institution's first choice, but in some situations it may need to use one of the alternate dates. The Commission will confirm the visit date soon after receiving the institution's reply form.

The institution should choose one date in each cycle: Fall cycle–September, October, November; Winter cycle–December, January, February; Spring cycle–March, April, May. The institution should follow these guidelines in selecting the dates.

- **Avoid certain dates.** Don't schedule visits during examination or vacation periods, the NCA Annual Meeting, or major professional meetings (e.g. AAJC, ACE, AASCU). **You should also consider major religious holidays as well as state and national holidays and traditional vacation periods. The Commission meeting calendar appears in Appendix G.**
- **Choose the month:**
    - ◇ **First choice.** The Commission is interested in achieving a good distribution of visits throughout the academic year. The clustering of visits in a few months of the year increases the difficulty of finding Evaluation Team members and overburdens the Commission's review process. **So please consider making your first choice of dates in months other than in the traditionally popular evaluation months of October, March, and April.**
    - ◇ **Alternate choice.** You will need to provide two alternate dates, one in each of the other two cycles that is not the cycle of your first choice.
- **Choose the days:**
    - ◇ **Comprehensive evaluations** (initial candidacy, initial accreditation, continued accreditation) require three days. Choose **Monday-Wednesday** during the regular academic year.
    - ◇ **Focused evaluations and evaluations for continued candidacy** require two days. Choose **Monday-Tuesday** dates during the regular academic year.
- **Choose dates that give you timely Commission action**
    - ◇ Most October-December visits will be considered at a Winter Commission meeting.
    - ◇ Most January-May visits will be considered at a Summer Commission meeting.
    - ◇ Visits scheduled after May and/or those that have not completed the review process in time for Summer action will be considered at a Fall Commission meeting.

☐ Commission Staff Assistance

The Commission staff liaison reviews the institution's Self-Study Plan, provides counsel about ways to integrate the self-study process for Commission evaluation with an institution's ongoing evaluation and planning programs, develops a proposed team for the evaluation visit, and reviews the final draft of the institution's Self-Study Report. It should be clearly understood, however, that staff **do not** make candidacy or accreditation decisions or recommendations.

☐ The Annual Meeting

One- and two-year reminder letters also encourage the institution to send representatives to the Commission's Annual Meeting held in Chicago in early spring. Many sessions provide guidance about various elements of the self-study and accreditation processes, an opportunity to review Commission policies and procedures and to examine sample self-studies, and a chance to exchange information and ideas with people from other institutions who are or have recently been engaged in self-study. The Pre-Conference Workshop on Self-Study focuses on the practical aspects of the self-study and evaluation processes. Workshop mentor sessions, led by recent Self-Study Coordinators are offered in two tracks–one for those just beginning the self-study process and one for those who are at the stage of writing the Self-Study Report and preparing for the team visit.

Attendance is voluntary. The Annual Meeting is open to all persons interested in self-study and institutional improvement; it is particularly useful for Self-Study Coordinators, Steering Committee members, Executive Officers, and trustees of institutions scheduled for evaluations in the **next two to three years.** Program information and registration materials are widely distributed to member institutions, Consultant-Evaluators, and others in late fall.

Paper at this stage of the process: Registration packets for the Annual Meeting are sent by the Commission in December.

☐ The Self-Study Process

The process of institutional self-study is the foundation of the Commission's comprehensive evaluations for initial and continued candidacy and accreditation. The institution plans and undertakes a self-study process to determine how well it meets the Criteria and to identify what it can do to improve or enhance its programs and operations. The results of this self-study are summarized in a Self-Study Report. The completed Self-Study Report constitutes the institution's formal application for initial or continued candidacy or accreditation and forms the basis for the Commission's evaluation. When it receives the two-year reminder of a forthcoming comprehensive evaluation–if not before–the institution should begin to organize its self-study process.

At the beginning of the self-study process, the institution develops a **Self-Study Plan** and forwards it to its Commission staff liaison. The plan should:

- ◇ establish a self-study calendar and timetable
- ◇ identify goals for the self-study process
- ◇ determine how the General Institutional Requirements and the Criteria for Accreditation will be addressed in the self-study process and report
- ◇ identify how the institution will respond to and report on concerns expressed by previous NCA teams
- ◇ include a preliminary outline of the Self-Study Report

Paper at this stage of the process: The Self-study plan is sent by the institution to the Commission staff liaison approximately two years before the visit.

☐ Choosing an Evaluation Team

While the institution is gathering, evaluating, and beginning to organize its information into a formal Self-Study Report, the Commission staff liaison is developing a proposed team from the Commission's corps of Consultant-Evaluators (C-Es). Several months before the visit is to take place, the staff liaison submits the names of the proposed team members to the Executive Officer of the institution for comment. Following this institutional review, the Commission formally invites the team members to serve and formally notifies the institution when all team members have accepted the assignment.

Paper at this stage in the process: Evaluation Visit Summary Sheet and Professional Data Forms of C-Es are sent by the Commission staff to the institution.

☐ Materials for the Evaluation

The institution sends the final Self-Study Report, completed Basic Institutional Data forms, audited financial statements for the two most recently completed fiscal years, the latest institutional catalog(s), and faculty and student handbooks to the Commission and to all team members. The Commission sends to the team relevant materials from its files.

Paper at this stage in the process: Institutional materials include: Self-Study Report, Basic Institutional Data forms, audited financial statements for the two most recently completed fiscal years, institutional catalogs, faculty and student handbooks. Commission materials include: Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status, Record of Status and Scope, Evaluation Visits Summary Sheet, documents from the institution's file in the Commission office.

☐ Evaluation Fee

The Commission bills the institution for the evaluation according to its current Evaluation Fee Schedule. The institution must pay the evaluation fee at least one month before the evaluation visit. In some cases, the visit may be billed on the basis of actual cost plus a fee for administrative costs. In those cases, the Commission may require a deposit before the visit.

Paper at this stage in the process: Invoice for the evaluation visit is sent by the Commission office to the institution.

☐ The Evaluation Visit

The team conducts the evaluation visit, validating the institution's self-assessment, gathering information about the institution, and summarizing its findings in a written Team Report. Team members usually arrive the evening before the visit officially begins to review their strategies for the evaluation. During the visit, team members may interview members of the administration, the Board, the state coordinating or governing agency, the faculty, the student body, and the community. Before leaving the campus, the team meets with the Executive Officer and others invited by the Executive Officer to summarize its findings and outline its perceptions of institutional strengths and concerns. During this **exit session** the Team Chair also informs the institution of the proposed team recommendation and the rationale for that recommendation.

Paper at this stage in the process: Institution sets aside specific materials for the team in a resource room on campus.

☐ The Team Report

The Team Report assesses whether the institution satisfies the General Institutional Requirements and the Criteria. Moreover, the Team Report contains a section on strengths and challenges as well as advice and suggestions for institutional improvement. It concludes with a formal recommendation for accreditation action and the rationale for that recommendation.

The Team Report process involves two stages: the **draft report** and the **final report.** In responding to the draft, the institution communicates directly with the Team Chair to correct factual errors. Team members and Commission staff also receive and respond to the draft report. The Team Chair submits the final report to the Commission. The Commission is responsible for distributing the Team Report to the institution and the team.

Paper at this stage in the process: The Team Chair distributes the draft Team Report; the institution, team members, and Commission staff comment on the draft Team Report; the Team Chair sends the final Team Report to the Commission.

☐ The Institutional Response

The Executive Officer makes a formal written response to the Team Report. This response becomes part of the official record of the evaluation, is considered during the Commission's review process, and is made available to the next team that visits the institution. The institution sends its response **to the Commission** and sends copies **to each team member.** It reserves additional copies for distribution to members of the review process.

Paper at this stage in the process: Institution responds to the Team Report.

☐ The Review Processes

The Commission has established two processes for the review of institutional evaluations: the **Readers' Panel** and the **Review Committee.** Institutions undergoing evaluations for continued candidacy, continued accreditation, or focused evaluations choose the process they prefer. If there is no substantial disagreement between the institution and the Evaluation Team concerning the team recommendations, the institution typically chooses the Readers' Panel. If there is disagreement, the institution asks to be considered by a Review Committee. Review Committee consideration is required if the evaluation is for either initial candidacy or initial accreditation, or if the team recommends imposing or removing probation.

Paper at this stage in the process: The institution sends its self-study materials and response to the Team Report to the members of the review process; the Commission sends the Team Report. At the conclusion of the review process, the Commission notifies the institution and team of the review process recommendation.

☐ Response to Review Committee Recommendation

If the institution was considered by a Review Committee, the Commission requests the Executive Officer to respond in writing to the Review Committee's recommendation before the Commission acts on the recommendation. As part of its response, the institution may include any additional materials it thinks will be relevant to the Commission's decision. The Team Chair also is invited to respond to the Review Committee recommendation. These responses also become a part of the official record and are shared with the next Evaluation Team.

Paper at this stage in the process: The institution and Team Chair respond to the Review Committee recommendation.

☐ Commission Action

The Commission holds three formal meetings a year at which it makes decisions about the affiliation status of institutions. Actions also are taken between meetings by means of mail ballots, conference calls, or other forms of telecommunication. Before taking action, the Commissioners review all recommendations from Commission staff, from Evaluation Teams, from Evaluators' Panels, from Readers' Panels, and from Review Committees.

A letter from the Executive Director of the Commission to the Executive Officer of the institution provides formal notification of the Commission's action. This "action letter" is accompanied by a copy of the institution's Record of Status and Scope, which includes a revised Statement of Affiliation Status section. If the Commission acts to invoke probation or to deny or withdraw accreditation or candidacy, the formal notification sets forth the Commission's reasons for the action. The Commission sends a copy of the action letter to the Chair of the institution's governing board.

Paper at this stage in the process: The Commission sends an action letter with the new Record of Status and Scope.

☐ The Appeals Process

The Constitution of the North Central Association provides for appeal of Commission actions that deny or withdraw accreditation or candidacy. Notice of intent to appeal must be adopted by the institution's governing board and be filed by the institution with the Secretary of the Association not later than 30 days following the date of the Commission's action. The appeals documents are available from the Commission office or on the Commission's Web site.

Paper at this stage in the process: In cases of denial or withdrawal of status, the institution may request the Association appeal documents.

A Sample Timeline for the Comprehensive Evaluation Process

It usually takes at least four full semesters for an institution to plan, execute, and report a comprehensive Self-Study. When it receives the Commission's two-year reminder of a forthcoming comprehensive evaluation–if not before–the institution should begin to organize its self-study process. The timeline below is a sample, provided to help institutions understand Commission expectations and to prepare for self-study and evaluation. The evaluation process is not complete until Commission action has been taken.

Before the Visit	Month (if known)	By	Task
24-32 months	September	Commission	• sends two-year reminder letter to institution notifying it of the scheduled evaluation
	Sep-Oct	Institution	• initiates planning the self-study process
22-30 months	November	Institution	• notifies Commission of its Self-Study Coordinator, its preferred dates for the visit, and any proposed changes in its Statement of Affiliation Status • appoints Self-Study Steering Committee
21-29 months	December	Commission	• sends Annual Meeting information and registration packets to institutions
		Institution	• Self-Study Steering Committee develops a self-study plan and submits it to Commission staff for review • Steering Committee organizes and selects principal subcommittees
19-25 months	March/April	Institution	• participates in the Self-Study Coordinators Workshops and other programs at the NCA Annual Meeting
18-24 months	March/April	Institution	• Sub-committees gather data, interview, analyze, and develop draft reports for submission to the Steering Committee
11-18 months	November	Commission	• sends one-year reminder letter to institution, confirms dates of visit, provides Basic Institutional Data (BID) forms
10-17 months	December	Commission	• sends Annual Meeting information and registration packets to institutions
	Dec-Jan	Institution	• sends Commission information suggesting team competencies
9-16 months	January	Commission	• confirms date of visit and other institutional information
7-14 months	March/April	Institution	• participates in the Self-Study Coordinators Workshops and other programs at the NCA Annual Meeting

Before the Visit	Month (if known)	By	Task
10 months		Institution	• **Steering Committee analyzes information prepared, completes studies, prepares rough draft of Self-Study Report**
7-8 months		Institution	• Steering Committee circulates and receives reactions to draft report
6 months		Institution	• Editor compiles final Self-Study Report
5-12 months	May	Commission	• sends a list of proposed team members and an Evaluation Visit Summary Sheet to institution
5-11 months	May/June	Institution	• sends comments on proposed team members to the Commission
4-11 months	June-July	Commission	• formally invites team members to participate
4-8 months	July-Oct	Commission	• notifies institution and team that team is complete (in general, fall teams are completed by August 1, spring teams are completed by October 15)
3-6 months		Team	• Team chair contacts institution to make arrangements for evaluation visit
3 months		Institution	• completes duplication of Self-Study Report, completes BIDs, etc. • prepares for team visit
1.5-2 months		Institution	• sends one complete set of evaluation materials to each member of the Evaluation Team and to the Commission staff liaison
		Commission	• sends materials for the visit, including the Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status, to team and institution
0 months		All	• **The evaluation visit takes place**

After the Visit	Month (if known)	By	Task
4 weeks		**Team Chair**	• **Team Chair completes draft of Team Report and sends it to the Commission staff and Team members for review**
5 weeks		Commission	• Commission staff liaison discusses draft with Team Chair
		Team	• Team members submit corrections to Team Chair
6 weeks		Team Chair	• sends draft Team Report to the institution for correction of errors of fact

After the Visit	Month (if known)*	By	Task
8 weeks		**Institution**	- **Institution responds to draft Team Report**
9 weeks		Team Chair	- Team Chair completes final Team Report and submits it to the Commission
		Commission	- duplicates Team Report and sends copies to the institution and the team
11 weeks	2 weeks after receipt of final report	Institution	- sends response to Team Report to Commission and team and (if it has a choice) chooses the review process it prefers
3-5 months			Review Process-Readers' Panel:
	1-2 weeks after response filed	Commission	- sends names of readers to institution; sends Team Report to each Reader
	on receipt of letter from Commission	Institution	- sends Self-Study Report, BIDs, institutional catalogs, faculty and student handbooks, and response to Team Report to each Reader
	approx. 4-6 weeks later	Commission	- notifies institution and team about Readers' recommendations
			Review Process-Review Committee:
	4-5 weeks before the meeting	Commission	- sends Review Committee schedule and names of Committee members to institution and Team Chair and sends Team Report to Review Committee members
	3-4 weeks before the meeting	Institution	- sends each Review Committee member Self-Study Report, BIDs, institutional response, and any other information it believes is relevant
	typically Jan or June	All	- Institution and team representatives meet with the Review Committee
	1 week after mtg	Commission	- notifies institution and Team Chair of Review Committee's recommendations and invites their response
	2 weeks after mtg	Institution/ Team Chair	- Respond to Review Committee's Recommendation
3 months or more	Feb, Aug, Nov*	Commission	- Commission action
	1 week after mtg	Commission	- Executive Director sends action letter to Executive Officer and Chair of the Board of the institution; sends copies to each Evaluation Team member

*Some institutional actions are taken by mail ballot between Commission meetings.

After the Visit	Month (if known)	By	Task
		Institution	• begins to implement plan for following up on recommendations and issues identified in the Self-Study Report and the Team Report

A Sample Timeline for the Commission-Mandated Focused Visit

Before the Visit	By	Task
12 months or more	Commission	• sends reminder letter to institution notifying it of the scheduled evaluation
12 months	Institution	• organizes the focused Self-Study Steering Committee around the topic or topics of concern
6 months	Institution	• prepares Focused Visit Report
5 months	Commission	• sends a list of proposed team members and an Evaluation Visit Summary Sheet to institution
	Institution	• sends comments on proposed team members to the Commission
4 months	Commission	• formally invites team members to participate
	Commission	• notifies institution and team that team is complete
3 months	Team	• Team chair contacts institution to make arrangements for evaluation visit
2 months	Institution	• completes the Focused Visit Report
1-1.5 months	Institution	• submits Focused Visit Report, related materials (e.g., Catalog), and relevant sections of the BID forms to each Team member and to its Staff Liaison
	Team Chair	• contacts each Team member
	Commission	• sends materials for the visit, including the Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status, to Team and institution
0 months	All	• focused visit takes place

The timeline following the team visit is essentially the same as that for the comprehensive evaluation.

A Sample Timeline for the Focused Visit for Institutional Change

Before the Visit	By	Task
5 months	Institution	• notifies Staff Liaison of proposed change in keeping with the Commission's policy on Institutional Change (Chapter 12) which may require monitoring through a focused visit
4 months	Institution	• secures all external and internal approvals required for the change request; • prepares and completes Focused Visit Report, providing documentation as outlined by the ten items in Chapter 12
3 months	Team	• Team chair contacts institution to make arrangements for evaluation visit
	Institution	• notifies Staff Liaison in writing of proposed change and requests a focused visit
3-2 months	Commission	• staff liaison appoints Team
2 months	Institution	• completes the Focused Visit Report
1-1.5 months	Institution	• submits Focused Visit Report and related materials (e.g., catalog) to each Team member and to its Staff Liaison
	Team Chair	• contacts each Team Member
	Commission	• sends materials for the visit, including the Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status, to Team and institution
0 Months	All	• focused visit takes place

The timeline following the team visit is essentially the same as that for the comprehensive evaluation.

Institutional Materials for the Evaluation Process

Materials to be Prepared by the Institution for Distribution

Materials to be Prepared

(by the Institution)

- ☐ the appropriate Self-Study Report
- ☐ completed Basic Institutional Data forms (sent by the Commission a year before the visit) (BIDs are available on the Commission's Web site)
- ☐ audited financial statements for the two most recently completed fiscal years
- ☐ current copies of all institutional catalog(s) or course bulletins
- ☐ faculty, staff, and student handbooks

Distribution of Materials

Six to eight weeks prior to the visit, the institution sends

- ☐ one set of materials to the Commission staff liaison and
- ☐ one set of materials to each member of the Evaluation Team.

Following the visit, the institution sends the materials listed, together with its Institutional Response to the Team Report, to each member of the appropriate review process. The Commission sends the names and addresses of the reviewers to the institution, after the final Team Report and Institutional Response have been received. The institution will need

- ☐ two sets of materials for a Readers' Panel and
- ☐ up to twelve sets of materials for a Review Committee.

The institution should produce additional sets of materials for its own use.

Materials to be Available to the Team during the Visit

(in a Resource Room established by the institution)

- ☐ minutes of major institutional committees, including Self-Study Committee
- ☐ reports referenced in the Self-Study Report or used by working committees
- ☐ policies and procedures related to curriculum adoption, review, and evaluation
- ☐ policies on learning resources, including libraries, and formal agreements for the shared use of learning resources
- ☐ policies on interaction with other academic institutions and programs
- ☐ policies for allocation and use of computer resources
- ☐ budgets and expenditure reports for units, programs, and the institution as a whole, and the institutional audits, at least for the prior five years
- ☐ physical facilities master plan
- ☐ maintenance plans
- ☐ catalogs, bulletins, viewbooks, and other institutional promotional literature
- ☐ academic admission, good standing, and completion policies
- ☐ policies related to the employment, orientation, supervision, and evaluation of full-time faculty, part-time faculty, and teaching assistants
- ☐ faculty, student, and staff handbooks
- ☐ bylaws of faculty and staff assemblies or other representative bodies
- ☐ governance documents: charter, bylaws, policies, membership, minutes, reports
- ☐ a complete roster of all faculty members (full- and part-time) and their teaching assignments during the current academic term
- ☐ formal agreements for all consortia or contractual relationships
- ☐ student service policies (residence, governance, health, financial aid, student records), and the refund policy
- ☐ board rosters, charters, and bylaws, including those of separately incorporated entities (e.g., research, development, foundation, alumni associations, or athletic corporations)
- ☐ reports from other agencies or accrediting bodies
- ☐ documents concerning Title III compliance and recertification (see Chapter 14)
- ☐ third party comment notices (see Chapter 5)

Commission Materials for the Evaluation Process

Materials Distributed by the Commission

to the Institution and each Evaluation Team Member

☐ the Evaluation Visit Summary Sheet;

☐ the institution's Record of Status and Scope, which includes the Statement of Affiliation Status and the Statement of Institutional Scope and Activities;

☐ a Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status;

☐ the most recent Institutional Annual Report;

☐ the official record of the most recent comprehensive visit;

☐ the official record of any focused visits that have taken place and/or institutional changes approved since the last comprehensive evaluation;

☐ an expense voucher.

A Planning Checklist for the Team Chair

The Team Chair should contact the executive officer to request that the institution

- ☐ make hotel reservations
- ☐ reserve a team meeting room at the hotel
- ☐ provide a team meeting room on campus
- ☐ provide secretarial assistance or word processing equipment, if possible
- ☐ arrange for early meetings during the visit with
  - ◇ members of the governing board
  - ◇ representatives of the state coordinating board or other related agency, as appropriate
  - ◇ faculty representatives
  - ◇ student representatives
  - ◇ alumni and community leaders
- ☐ announce the visit and the availability of the team to confer with institutional personnel and groups during "open time"
- ☐ make certain that all key personnel are available during the visit
- ☐ place the materials specified in Chapter 5 in the team's meeting room on campus
- ☐ mail all institutional materials to the staff liaison six to eight weeks before the visit and to the team

The Team Chair should contact team members to

- ☐ welcome any new C-Es or one-time C-Es and offer to provide additional assistance
- ☐ notify team members of hotel and other arrangements
- ☐ schedule the first team meeting
- ☐ share the preliminary plan for the evaluation visit
- ☐ make tentative assignments of areas of special responsibility, including report writing
- ☐ make clear whether the team members are expected to write their reports before the exit session or one week after the visit
- ☐ request that Team Members review the *Handbook of Accreditation* and that they bring it with them to the institution

The team chair should send copies of all correspondence to the Commission staff liaison who coordinated the visit.

A Team Report Checklist for the Team Chair

☐ **Cover page**

☐ **Table of Contents**

☐ **Section I: The Introduction**
  - ☐ the organization of the report
  - ☐ institution's accreditation history
  - ☐ structure and scope of this visit
  - ☐ comments about the audiences for the report
  - ☐ evaluation of the utility of the institution's self-study process and Self-Study Report

☐ **Section II: Evaluation for Affiliation**
  - ☐ institutional response to previous concerns/challenges
  - ☐ the General Institutional Requirements (GIRs)
  - ☐ the Criteria for Accreditation (for Candidacy visits, see Chapter 13)
  - ☐ institutional compliance with the Higher Education Reauthorization Act

☐ **Section III: Strengths and Concerns**

☐ **Section IV: Advice and Suggestions for Institutional Improvement**

☐ **Section V: The Team Recommendation and Rationale**
(it is critical that this section be able to function as a stand-alone document)
  - ☐ the recommendation sentence
  - ☐ the rationale
  - ☐ the Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status

Distribution of the Team Report

☐ **four weeks after visit:** Team Chair sends draft to Commission staff liaison and team members

☐ **five weeks after visit:** Commission staff liaison and team members provide comments on draft report to Team Chair

☐ **six weeks after visit:** Team Chair sends draft to institution for correction of errors of fact

☐ **eight weeks after visit:** institution submits corrections to Team Chair

☐ **nine weeks after visit:** Team Chair submits final report to Commission. Commission distributes final report to institution and team

A Sample SAS Worksheet

WORKSHEET FOR STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION STATUS

INSTITUTION: JOHN DEWEY COLLEGE
1100 South State Street
Chicago, IL 60605

TYPE OF REVIEW: Continued accreditation

DATE OF THIS REVIEW: January 26-28, 1998

COMMISSION ACTION:
____ Adopt Team recommended wording
____ Refer to a Review Committee for further consideration

STATUS: Accredited: 1952- .

Institution *Recommended Wording:* RETAIN ORIGINAL WORDING

Team *Recommended Wording:* RETAIN ORIGINAL WORDING

HIGHEST DEGREE AWARDED: Master's

Institution *Recommended Wording:* RETAIN ORIGINAL WORDING

Team *Recommended Wording:* RETAIN ORIGINAL WORDING

MOST RECENT ACTION: October 16, 1990

TO BE CHANGED BY THE COMMISSION OFFICE

STIPULATIONS: Out of state offerings are limited to the M.B.A. offered in Dubuque, IA. International offerings are limited to the Bachelor of Arts degree offered in Tokyo, Japan.

Institution *Recommended Wording:* Out of state offerings are limited to the M.B.A. offered in Dubuque, IA, and Kenosha, WI. International offerings are limited to the Bachelor of Arts degree offered in Tokyo, Japan.

Team *Recommended Wording:* Same as institution's recommended wording.

JOHN DEWEY COLLEGE
Page two

NEW DEGREE SITES: No prior Commission approval for offering existing bachelor's degree programs at new sites in Cook and DuPage counties.

Institution *Recommended Wording:* RETAIN ORIGINAL WORDING

Team *Recommended Wording:* RETAIN ORIGINAL WORDING

PROGRESS REPORTS REQUIRED: None.

Team *Recommended Wording:* RETAIN ORIGINAL WORDING

MONITORING REPORTS REQUIRED: None.

Team *Recommended Wording:* A report by October 1, 1999, on recruitment and retention of students.

CONTINGENCY REPORTS REQUIRED: None.

Team *Recommended Wording:* RETAIN ORIGINAL WORDING

FOCUSED EVALUATIONS: None.

Team *Recommended Wording:* A visit in 2000-01 focused on the faculty development program and development at the graduate level.

LAST COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATIONS: 1987-88.

TO BE CHANGED BY THE COMMISSION OFFICE

NEXT COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATIONS: 1997-98.

Team *Recommended Wording:* 2007-08.

A Sample
Evaluation Visit Summary Sheet

8/17/94

NORTH CENTRAL ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
30 North LaSalle Street, Suite 2400, Chicago, Illinois 60602-2504
(800) 621-7440 (312) 263-0456 (312) 263-7462 FAX

Evaluation Visit Summary Sheet

Institution: **John Dewey College**
1100 South State Street
Chicago, IL 60605
Dr. Jane E. Jones, President
(312) 942-6060 Ext. 20 (312) 942-6061 FAX

ID # 1234

Self-Study Coordinator: Dr. Steven J. Doe
Academic Dean
(312) 942-6060 Ext. 25

Institution information:
Legal status: Private
Level of highest degree: Master's
FTE student enrollment: **1,405**

STATUS: Team Set

Date of Visit:
January 26-28, 1998

Reports Due:
Draft to Institution: March 11, 1998
Final to NCA: April 1, 1998

Number on team: 4
Length of visit: 3 days
Evaluation fee: **$6,690**

NCA staff liaison:
Dr. George Johnson

Type of evaluation: Continued accreditation
Other visit features: N/A

Evaluation Team (Chair listed first):

51235	**Dr. Emma Willard** Dean, College of Education Hutchins University Aspen, CO 80303	(303) 499-7111 (303) 499-7112 FAX
51157	**Dr. Willard Gibbs** Professor of Physics Oppenheimer University One University Place Los Alamos, NM 87105	(505) 666-1212 (505) 666-1255 FAX
51892	**Dr. Elizabeth Peabody** President Curti College Madison, WI 53703	(608) 521-6371 (608) 521-6376 FAX
51434	**Dr. Charles S. Pierce** Chair, Humanities Division Fitzgerald College 2500 College Drive St. Paul, MN 55422	(612) 323-4140 (612) 323-4141 FAX

Commission Fee Schedule for 1997-98 Evaluation Processes

☐ Fees for Team Visits to Institutions

- **Fixed Fee Basis.** The fixed fee schedule for evaluation visits is based on the number of evaluation team members and the length (number of days) of the visit. The evaluation fee covers all direct costs associated with the evaluation visit. The following table illustrates the formula used to calculate the fixed fee.

1997-98 Evaluations • Sample Fixed Fee Schedule
(N = number of persons on team.)

	N = 1	N = 2	N = 3	N = 4	N = 5	N = 6	N = 7	N = 8
1 day	1,940	3,110	4,280	5,450	6,620	7,800	8,970	10,140
2 days	2,090	3,420	4,740	6,070	7,400	8,720	10,050	11,380
3 days	2,240	3,730	5,210	6,690	8,170	9,650	11,130	12,610

Computing additional team members:

- ◇ For a two day visit, add $1,225 for each additional Consultant-Evaluator assigned to the team.
- ◇ For a three-day visit, add $1,380 for each additional Consultant-Evaluator assigned to the team.

- **Cost-Plus Basis.** This fee structure is designed for multi-site or sequential visits where additional or extensive team travel is required. Use of this fee structure requires staff approval: direct cost of the visit + a fee for administration. A deposit is required before the visit.

☐ Fees for Other Types of Evaluations

Evaluators' Panel Process	$500
Pre-Visits by Team Chairs	cost-plus basis
Generalist Service	cost-plus basis
Confirmation Visits	cost-plus basis
Preliminary Information Form Process	$1,000 with initial submission; $500 on completion

11 Other Monitoring Visits

FOCUSED EVALUATIONS

Focused evaluations do not require a comprehensive institutional self-study process, nor do they require a comprehensive Self-Study Report. Focused evaluations are of two types, those **mandated by prior Commission action** to evaluate specific areas or issues within institutions and those that occur as part of **review of proposed institutional changes.** An institution's preparation for a focused evaluation will vary in nature and scope according to the specific areas to be examined. Its Focused Visit Report will concentrate on those areas. In addition, the materials for the evaluation will include any documents the institution and the Commission staff believe the Evaluation Team should have before arriving on campus, including but not limited to catalogs, faculty and student handbooks, and relevant portions of the Basic Institutional Data Forms.

☐ Institutional Report for a Commission-Mandated Focused Evaluation

Because focused evaluations are so specific and usually are limited to two or three topics or areas, institutional reports for focused evaluations will vary considerably in structure, concept, and length. It is important to assess the specific areas of focus in relation to the overall institutional context. For example, if a focused evaluation is scheduled to review faculty-administration relations, the Focused Visit Report should comment on the effect these issues have had on the educational program and student morale. Institutions preparing for a focused evaluation should maintain regular contact with the Commission staff liaison and discuss plans for the report.

The specific issues that prompted the evaluation will shape the report any given institution prepares. However, all Focused Visit Reports will include the following essential elements:

- ◇ **Introduction.** In the Introduction, the institution briefly cites the Commission action or policy that prompted the evaluation, discusses the process by which the report has been prepared, and explains the organization of the report.
- ◇ **Examination of the area(s) of focus.** In the body of the report, the institution examines the areas of focus. If the focused evaluation is to assess progress in responding to previous Commission concerns, this section of the report will explain the actions that have been taken since the last evaluation. It should evaluate the progress made and indicate any further actions that may be planned. Depending on the areas of focus, this part of the report may be supplemented by audited financial statements, Board minutes, curriculum information, or other appendices that document the progress summarized in the report itself.

Focused Visit Reports will vary in length; length should be adequate to cover every essential element.

☐ Institutional Report for a Focused Evaluation for Institutional Change

Focused Visit Reports for institutional change follow the same basic format as reports for Commission-mandated focused visits, but the body of the report must focus on the specific request for extension of accreditation to include the change. **To support that request, the body of the report must address the ten areas of information and documentation for support of institutional change.** These areas need to be addressed even if the institution includes in its request copies of applications that have been submitted to other agencies, such as state governing boards (see Chapter 12).

☐ Team Preparations for a Focused Evaluation

Information provided earlier about planning, conducting, and reporting the results of an evaluation visit are necessary reading for every team undertaking any evaluation for the Commission (see Chapters 7 and 8). Focused evaluations alter both the scope of an institution's preparation and materials for a visit and the nature of the team's evaluation and report. Focused evaluations occur between comprehensive evaluations and examine only certain aspects of an institution (see Chapter 2). They are meant to monitor developments, changes, or concerns arising between comprehensive visits. In most respects, the policies and procedures governing focused evaluations are similar to those governing comprehensive evaluations; however, there are a number of significant differences.

- **Charge to the team.** The first of these differences is that the role of the Evaluation Team is different from that of a team conducting a comprehensive evaluation. The focused Evaluation Team does not evaluate whether an institution fulfills the Criteria for Accreditation; nor does it recommend that candidacy or accreditation be granted, continued, or denied. However, it can recommend Probation if circumstances warrant, and in very rare situations, that status be withdrawn.

  The team's basic role is to evaluate the areas specified as the focus of the visit and to provide the Commission with a progress report on developments at the institution since the last comprehensive evaluation. However, if matters outside the focus of the visit come to the attention of the team it should note these, recommending changes in the Statement of Affiliation Status if necessary to deal with these additional areas (e.g., modifying current wording or calling for a report or a focused visit). The focused Evaluation Team does not simply verify. The team may recommend that a program, site, or other operation be added, restricted, or even discontinued. Some changes will result in changes to the SISA rather than the SAS.

- **Team preparations for the focused visit.** Before the visit, the Commission sends team members an Evaluation Visit Summary Sheet, a Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status, the most recent Annual Report to the Commission, and the official record of the most recent comprehensive evaluation and copies of any subsequent official interactions with the Commission. The institution sends each team member a copy of its Focused Visit Report and any supporting materials it believes the team should have before arriving on campus, including catalogs, faculty and student handbooks, and relevant portions of the Commission's Basic Institutional Data Forms.

  The Team Chair proceeds as he or she would for a comprehensive evaluation: initiating contact with the institution and the team, coordinating arrangements for the visit, and communicating the plan for the visit to both the institution and the team members.

- **Conducting the focused visit.** Focused evaluations typically involve two team members for two days. Some unique focused visits may require several days and several team members. At the first team meeting on the evening before the visit officially begins, the chairperson reviews the purpose of the visit, formulates final assignments, and covers other relevant parts of the outline discussed earlier (see Chapter 7). The focused Evaluation Team is principally concerned with the aspects specified for the focused evaluation (e.g., enrollment patterns, finances, building program, curriculum development, specific requests for institutional change). Therefore, the data needed by the team are circumscribed. The team will need to direct its energies primarily toward gathering the data it needs for dealing with the areas of focus. Its fundamental purposes are to determine whether the institution has addressed the areas of concern and to assess the impact of significant changes related to them.

- **Writing the Team Report.** The team summarizes its findings concerning the areas of focus in a written report. While each Team Report of a focused evaluation is different, every one must contain four sections; three of these are the same as those in a comprehensive report; one is different.

  - ◇ Section I, an introduction: the team provides certain matters of information.
  - ◇ Section II: the team assesses the areas of focus.
  - ◇ Section III: the team identifies related institutional strengths and concerns.

- ◇ Section IV: the team provides advice and suggestions to the institution.
- ◇ Section V: the team provides its formal recommendation and its rationale for that recommendation.

It is Section II of a focused Team Report that differs significantly from that of a comprehensive report because of the differences in purpose between comprehensive and focused evaluations. If the focused visit was required by a previous evaluation, the team's responsibility is to assess whether the institution has made progress in the areas identified and to report significant developments since the last evaluation visit.

If the focused evaluation was prompted by a proposed change, the team's responsibility is to evaluate the institution's response and documentation as outlined in Chapter 12 and to evaluate whether that change should be approved. This section of the Team Report should be detailed enough to allow readers to understand the most important changes the institution has undergone or is planning and to evaluate how well the institution has responded to previous Commission concerns.

Sections I, III, and IV are identical to those discussed in Chapter 8. Section V is basically the same as that discussed in Chapter 8. Like the report of a comprehensive evaluation, the report of a focused evaluation concludes with a fifth section: the team's recommendation. Like the comprehensive Team Report, the focused Team Report has a standard recommendation sentence, a rationale, and a Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status.

The recommendation sentence for every focused evaluation is the same:

> ***"The team's recommendations for action concerning College X are -----. The reasons for the team's recommendations are:"***

The recommendation sentence is followed by the team's statement of its rationale for **each** specific recommendation. The team does this by discussing its suggested version of the Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status. If the change does not require a modification of the SAS but, instead, a revision of the SISA, the team will recommend that modification.

Instructions for the preparation and distribution of the draft and final Team Reports are the same as those described for the Team Report for the comprehensive evaluation (see Chapter 8).

☐ Review Processes and Commission Action

As is the case with comprehensive evaluations, most focused visits must be evaluated by a review process before final action is taken by the Commission. Institutions undergoing focused visits may choose the process they prefer. In some unique circumstances, institutions undergoing focused evaluations for approval of a proposed change may, with staff approval, be considered directly by the Commission (see Chapter 9).

SPECIAL CASES

☐ Pre-Visits

In special cases, the Chair may arrange for a pre-visit if the institution requests it and the Commission staff concurs. Pre-visits are scheduled only when an institution believes that its structure or geographic locations

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require substantial advance discussion. Such visits normally last one day. The Team Chair makes the final decision about conducting a pre-visit after consulting with the Commission staff. The Commission office bills the institution separately for the cost of the pre-visit.

A pre-visit is devoted to establishing the details and logistics of the evaluation team visit. The Team Chair examines the institution's logistical or programmatic particularities, and develops an understanding of its context so that the team can approach its evaluation with a minimum of lost time and a maximum of effectiveness.

The Team Chair may review the institution's Self-Study Report as a part of the pre-visit to determine whether any additional information may be needed by the team. The Team Chair may also check on practical arrangements for the evaluation visit and confirm appointments with members of the institution's state or local governing board(s).

As soon as the pre-visit is completed, the Team Chair mails an expense voucher for the trip to the Commission office for reimbursement. At the same time, the Team Chair should contact the Commission staff liaison if the pre-visit has indicated that there may be significant omissions or imbalances in the team or if preparations for the evaluation appear to be at variance with the information the Commission has provided.

☐ Sequential Visits

In most cases, visits to institutions with off-campus programs or sites follow the patterns described earlier in this handbook. Establishing the logistics of the visit may require a pre-visit by the Team Chair; conducting the evaluation may involve team members separating for part of the visit to examine different sites—but the basic structure of the evaluation visit remains the same.

In some cases, however, an institution may have so many sites, so widely dispersed within and outside of its home state, the North Central region, and/or the United States that a sequential visit conducted over a longer period of time is required for a thorough evaluation of the institution and its operations. Sequential visits require that the Commission and the institution agree on an appropriate evaluation design and that Evaluation Team members be willing to commit themselves to a longer period of time away from their home campuses than is required for other types of visits. Team members who agree to serve on sequential visits receive additional information about the visit from the Commission staff. Fees for sequential evaluations are billed on a cost-plus basis.

☐ Interregional Visits

When the Commission visits an institution with a site outside the North Central region, the team may include representatives from the institutional accrediting association in whose region the site is located. The Commission retains full responsibility for these visits, including composing the team, establishing the procedures for the visit, and taking final accrediting action. The Commission regards its Team Report as the only official report of the visit and sends a copy of it to the other regional association as well as to the institution. The institution is billed for all Evaluation Team members in accordance with the Commission's fee schedule.

☐ Joint Visits

In a joint accrediting team visit, the Commission and another accrediting body together name a single team that prepares a single written report. The Commission and the other accrediting agency develop an agreement that outlines procedures and processes for the visit; the institution requesting a joint visit accepts the agreement. In some cases the team is chaired and the majority of the Team Report is written by an evaluator from the other association; in others, the Commission appoints the chair.

In either case, because each accrediting body makes its accrediting decision separately, the institution must address the Commission's General Institutional Requirements and the Criteria for Accreditation.

Commission policy restricts joint accrediting team visits with other recognized institutional accrediting bodies to those that accredit institutions primarily offering post-baccalaureate programs in a single discipline. The institution is billed separately for each organization's participation.

☐ Concurrent Visits

In an effort to coordinate activities and lessen the burden of preparation for institutions, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education may establish a formal agreement with a state agency for concurrent visits to specified institutions or types of institutions within its state. Such agreements may be made with program accrediting agencies. This agreement will define the understanding of the responsibilities of the two teams.

- ◇ Each agency will name its own team in keeping with its policies on conflict of interest and size of team.
- ◇ Each agency will designate a chair for its team; the chairs will coordinate the teams' interactions on campus.
- ◇ Teams will not participate together in interviews and group meetings to ensure that the college's constituencies clearly understand the differences between the responsibilities of each team.
- ◇ Teams may meet and confer on campus to share information, but each team separately determines its recommendations and writes its report.

The agreement should be sent to the chairs of both teams and should be noted on the Commission's Evaluation Visit Summary Sheet.

Concurrent visits only occur when the Commission is conducting a comprehensive evaluation. The institution must be the initiator of the request for a concurrent visit. The state agency, specialized agency, or the Commission (the Executive Director and/or Team Chair) can decide in specific situations that a concurrent visit is not appropriate. If one of the three parties decides against a concurrent visit, both agencies will hold their respective visits at different times.

☐ International Visits

The Commission policies on institutional change mandate that evaluation visits be conducted for certain international education programs and sites. Because of the unique nature of international visits, the Commission has endorsed the document, "Principles of Good Practice in Overseas International Education Programs for Non-U.S. Nationals" included as a Chapter Reference. It also has developed a separate "Practical Guide for Organizing and Conducting International Evaluation Visits" to assist institutions and teams in planning for and conducting these visits. The "Practical Guide" is provided to Evaluation Teams making international visits. It is available on request from the Commission office. Fees for international visits are billed on a cost-plus basis.

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☐ Confirmation/Advisory Visits

Occasionally an institution asks the Commission to conduct a visit required by another external agency. For example, some branches of the military, state agencies, and foreign countries require a site visit by a regional accrediting agency as a part of their formal approval processes. When a site visit is not required by the Commission itself, the Commission cooperates by sending an Evaluation Team to write a confirmation report for the institution to submit to the proper authorities.

Occasionally, the Commission may suggest that an institution host a team charged with advising the Commissioners about significant changes at the institution. Confirmation/advisory visits do not require official Commission action and, therefore, do not involve any processes beyond providing a report to the institution. The Commission office bills the institution for the confirmation visit.

☐ Generalist Service

From time to time, institutions ask the Commission to suggest names of evaluators who could serve as generalists on teams of recognized specialized accrediting bodies. The role of the generalist is to assist the Evaluation Team in approaching its task within the overall context of the institution. The Commission responds to these requests by providing the names of possible evaluators whom the institution might contact directly. Financial arrangements for such service are between the institution and the evaluator.

☐ Unannounced Inspections

The Commission conducts unannounced inspections to some institutions as required by Federal law. See Chapter 14 for further information.

Chapter Reference

Principles of Good Practice in Overseas International Education Programs for Non-U.S. Nationals

Introduction from the Commission

The Commission endorsed these *Principles* on March 19, 1990, not as a set of standards against which programs must be measured, for it understands that unique circumstances will shape unique programs, but as a working document of the Commission, subject to revision as more is learned from current experience. The *Principles* have received the endorsement of all of the regional accrediting commissions. They therefore reflect an emerging national consensus on good practices in specific types of international education.

The *Principles* speak to matters that deserve the scrutiny of all institutions engaged in or planning to engage in developing campuses or moving educational programs abroad. The *Principles* also should assist teams in understanding the full scope of the challenges involved in mounting and conducting international educational operations of quality.

From time-to-time new developments in higher education emerge almost without warning. In the absence of long experience or significant expertise, institutions wishing to participate in these developments often seek some external criteria by which to evaluate options. In the past decade international education has become a major thrust at many institutions. Not only are institutions developing new study abroad opportunities for their students, they also are establishing branch campuses abroad and are moving whole degree programs overseas. Higher education varies greatly throughout the nations of the world; so, too, have the various initiatives followed by U.S. institutions anxious to establish international operations. Historically, groups concerned with international education have concentrated on good practices in study abroad, in international recruitment, and in transfer of credit. NAFSA, for example, has developed useful guidelines on all of these forms of international education. But the transplantation of U.S. education abroad, U.S. education aimed primarily if not solely at non-U.S. nationals, constitutes something not yet covered in existing guidelines.

The Principles first appeared in a slightly different form in October 1989, as the Commission's *Guidelines for Good Practice in Overseas International Education Programs for Non-U.S. Nationals.* The Commission continues to review their usefulness, learning from institutions engaged in these ventures, from teams that evaluate them, and from the broader international community interested in them. The Commission welcomes comments on the Principles.

The Commission accredits institutions, not specific programs. Consequently, **these Principles do not supplant the Commission's General Institutional Requirements and Criteria for Accreditation or Criteria for Candidacy. Nor do they replace the Commission's processes for approving institutional change.** The Commission's *Handbook of Accreditation* clearly outlines all the requirements that institutions must meet to achieve and continue affiliation with the Commission; it also describes the change processes open to affiliated institutions.

The Principles

Institutional Mission

1. The international program is rooted in the U.S. institution's stated mission and purposes and reflects any special social, religious, and ethical elements of that mission.

2. The faculty, administration, and the governing board of the U.S. institution understand the relationship of the international program to the institution's stated mission and purposes.

Authorization

3. The international program has received all appropriate internal institutional approvals, including that of the governing board.

4. The international program has received all appropriate external approvals where required, including system administration, government bodies, and accrediting associations.

5. The U.S. institution documents the accepted legal basis for its operations in the host country.

Instructional Program

6. The U.S. institution specifies the educational needs to be met by its international program.

7. The content of the international educational program is subject to review by the U.S. institution's faculty.

8. The international education program reflects the educational emphasis of the U.S. institution, including a commitment to general education when appropriate.

9. The educational program is taught by faculty with appropriate academic preparation and language proficiencies, and whose credentials have been reviewed by the U.S. institution.

10. The standard of student achievement in the international program is equivalent to the standard of student achievement on the U.S. campus.

11. The international educational program where possible and appropriate is adapted to the culture of the host country.

Resources

12. The institution currently uses and assures the continuing use of adequate physical facilities for its international educational program, including classrooms, offices, libraries, and laboratories, and provides access to computer facilities where appropriate.

13. The U.S. institution has demonstrated its financial capacity to underwrite the international program without diminishing its financial support of the U.S. campus. Financing of the international program is incorporated into the regular budgeting and auditing process.

Admissions and Records

14. International students admitted abroad meet admissions requirements similar to those used for international students admitted to the U.S. campus, including appropriate language proficiencies.

15. The U.S. institution exercises control over recruitment and admission of students in the international program.

16. All international students admitted to the U.S. program are recognized as students of the U.S. institution.

17. All college-level academic credits earned in the international program are applicable to degree programs at the U.S. institution.

18. The U.S. institution maintains official records of academic credit earned in its international program.

19. The official transcript of record issued by the U.S. institution follows the institution's practices in identifying by site or through course numbering the credits earned in its off-campus programs.

Students

20. The U.S. institution assures that its international program provides a supportive environment for student development, consistent with the culture and mores of the international setting.

21. Students in the international program are fully informed as to services that will or will not be provided.

Control and Administration

22. The international program is controlled by the U.S. institution.

23. The teaching and administrative staff abroad responsible for the educational quality of the international program are accountable to a resident administrator of the U.S. institution.

24. The U.S. institution formally and regularly reviews all faculty and staff associated with its international program.

25. The U.S. institution assesses its international program on a regular basis in light of institutional goals and incorporates these outcomes into its regular planning process.

Ethics and Public Disclosure

26. The U.S. institution can provide to its accrediting agencies upon request a full accounting of the financing of its international program, including an accounting of funds designated for third parties within any contractual relationship.

27. The U.S. institution assures that all media presentations about the international program are factual, fair, and accurate.

28. The U.S. institution's primary catalog describes its international program.

29. The U.S. institution does not sell or franchise the rights to its name or its accreditation.

30. The U.S. institution assures that all references to transfer of academic credit reflect the reality of U.S. practice.

31. The U.S. institution assures that if U.S. accreditation is mentioned in materials related to the international program, the role and purpose of U.S. accreditation is fairly and accurately explained within these materials.

Contractual Arrangements

32. The official contract is in English and the primary language of the contracting institution.

33. The contract specifically provides that the U.S. institution controls the international program in conformity with these Principles and the requirements of the U.S. institution's accreditations.

34. The U.S. institution confirms that the foreign party to the contract is legally qualified to enter into the contract.

35. The contract clearly states the legal jurisdiction under which its provisions will be interpreted will be that of the U.S. institution.

36. Conditions for program termination specified in the contract include appropriate protection for enrolled students.

37. All contractual arrangements must be consistent with the regional commission's document defining contractual relationships with non-regionally accredited institutions.

Endorsed by the Executive Directors of the regional institutional accrediting bodies of the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation on February 14, 1990.

Endorsed by the North Central Association's Commission on Institutions of Higher Education on March 19, 1990, as a working document, with principles to be applied consistent with its own criteria.

12 Institutional Change

DEFINING INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

The Commission recognizes that change within affiliated institutions is as constant and rapid as it is challenging and inevitable. Some changes fall within the mission and scope of the institution (e.g., changing personnel, redefining course requirements, or initiating joint programs between two accredited institutions). These do not require special notification of the Commission and do not affect an institution's candidate or accreditation status with the Commission.

Other types of change (such as adding an instructional site that offers a degree program) come under the Commission's policies regarding institutional change and do affect an institution's relationship with the Commission. The Commission relies on affiliated institutions to report any changes under consideration that might affect their relationship with the Commission.

After a decade of defining institutional change through its Statement of Affiliation Status, the Commission decided to enact a series of policies that state explicitly the types of institutional change requiring Commission action and the processes by which the Commission will act.

☐ Commission Policies Regarding Institutional Dynamics

The Commission's policies on institutional change (identified under the heading I.C. Policies Regarding Institutional Dynamics) are reprinted here. Institutions and Teams should check the Web site for updates to these policies. The Commission's policies on institutional change themselves are likely to change.

■ I.C.1. Commission Right to Reconsider Affiliation

The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education reserves the right to reconsider the affiliation of an institution at any time. Clearly specified reasons related to Commission Criteria, Requirements, and/or policies will be provided by the Commission for its reconsideration.

■ I.C.2. Institutional Changes Requiring Commission Approval Prior to Their Initiation

The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education includes all institutional activities within the institution's affiliation status. Therefore, an institution planning to start certain types of changes must request that the Commission extend its status to include the new institutional activities. This request is to be made and Commission approval received before the change can be initiated. With the limited exceptions noted in Policy I.C.2c., when a staff recommendation can be made directly to the Commission, Commission decisions about these matters are based on a recommendation from one of the Commission's peer review processes.

The Commission is supportive of educational innovation and change necessary to improve educational quality. However, the Commission has a responsibility to seek assurance that institutional changes, particularly those that signify a departure from an institution's stated mission and purposes operative at the time of the most recent evaluation, are both appropriate to the institution and within the institution's capability of providing with quality.

Because some new institutional activities typically require significant investment in faculty, facilities, and other support services, the Commission has determined that it can act on an institutional request only after an evaluation visit, either focused or comprehensive, has recommended extension of affiliation to include the change or after an Evaluators' Panel has recommended that the change be approved.

Changes requiring Commission approval include, but are not limited to, the following (reformatted from policies I.C.2-I.C.5):

Changes in Stipulations by the Commission	**Approval Process Required**
Changing the stipulations within the current affiliation status. (I.C.2b.3.)	Evaluators' Panel or On-Site Visit
Changes in Educational Programs	
Adding a different degree level. (I.C.2a.1.)	On-Site Visit
Delivering for the first time a degree program offered primarily through distance delivery methods. (I.C.2a.4.)	On-Site Visit
Initiating a significant new academic program or major that requires substantial new financial investment or substantial reallocation of existing financial resources. (I.C.2b.1.)	Evaluators' Panel or On-Site Visit
Establishing a new academic program that shifts the mission of the institution (e.g., expanding from focused technical or professional education to broader liberal education, or the reverse). (I.C.2b.2.)	Evaluators' Panel or On-Site Visit
Offering courses regularly that are not currently included within the institution's affiliated status. (I.C.2c.4.)	Staff Recommendation, Evaluators' Panel, or On-Site Visit
Changes in Locations	
Delivering for the first time at an international site a degree program for either non-U.S. nationals or U.S. nationals who are not currently enrolled in the institution. (I.C.2a.2.)	On-Site Visit
Opening (or moving to) a new site that houses a full range of instruction as well as administrative and support services (e.g., a new campus or a new branch). Whether an on-site visit or Evaluators' Panel is used for gaining prior approval, an on-site visit, either focused or comprehensive, will be conducted within the first six months of the operation of the new site. (I.C.2b.4.)	Evaluators' Panel or On-Site Visit
Adding an instructional site at which the institution provides a degree program(s). (I.C.2b.7.)	Evaluators' Panel or On-Site Visit
Opening an off-campus site at which the institution offers 50% or more of the courses leading to one of its degree programs and at which the institution enrolls 100 or more students (unduplicated head counts) in an academic year. (I.C.2b.9.)	Evaluators' Panel or On-Site Visit
Offering five or more courses a year at an out-of-state site or at an international site. (I.C.2c.5.)	Staff Recommendation, Evaluators' Panel, or On-Site Visit
Closing an instructional site at which the institution has provided a degree program(s). (I.C.2c.2.)	Staff Recommendation, Evaluators' Panel, or On-Site Visit
Relations with Other Institutions/Groups	
Contracting with entities not regionally accredited to provide 50% or more of the credit-bearing instruction in the affiliated institution's program. (I.C.2a.3.)	On-Site Visit
Contracting with other regionally accredited institutions to provide 50% or more of the credit-bearing instruction involved in the affiliated institution's program. (I.C.2b.6.)	Evaluators' Panel or On-Site Visit
Merging/combining an accredited affiliated institution and an institution holding candidate status with a regional accrediting association. (I.C.2b.8.)	Evaluators' Panel or On-Site Visit

Relationships with Other Institutions/Group continued . . .	**Approval Process Required**
Merging of the affiliated institution and an entity not accredited by a regional institutional accrediting association. (I.C.2a.5.)	On-Site Visit
Changing institutional affiliation with a sponsoring organization (e.g., changing denominational affiliation). (I.C.2c.1.)	Staff Recommendation, Evaluators' Panel, or On-Site Visit
Changing ownership, control, and/or the legal status of the institution. (I.C.3.1.)	On-Site Review After Initiation (visit within six months)[1]
Transferring to a new entity the accredited statuses of two or more regionally accredited entities. (I.C.3.2.)	On-Site Review After Initiation (visit within one year)[1]
Merging two or more regionally accredited entities, or the absorption of a regionally accredited entity by another. (I.C.3.3.)	On-Site Review After Initiation (visit within one year)[1]
Notification of sanctions applied by governmental agencies. (I.C.5.3.)	Might require Commission monitoring[3]
Public sanctions applied by other institutional or professional accrediting associations. (I.C.5.5.)	Might require Commission monitoring[3]
Relationships with Students/Faculty/Administration/Governing Body	
Changing, after significant planning, the character and nature of the student body. (I.C.2b.5.)	Evaluators' Panel or On-Site Visit
Absorbing unanticipated but significant changes in the character and nature of the student body (e.g., assuming oversight for programs orphaned by a closing institution). (I.C.2c.3.)	Staff Recommendation, Evaluators' Panel, or On-Site Visit
Significant unanticipated reduction in program offering, faculty, and/or enrollment. (I.C.5.2.)	Might require Commission monitoring[3]
Existence of highly publicized and divisive controversies among the governing board, the administration, and/or the faculty. (I.C.5.1.)	Might require Commission monitoring[3]
Financial and Ethical Matters	
Financial audit reports that raise serious concerns about financial viability or financial management practices. (I.C.5.6.)	Might require Commission monitoring[3]
Declaring financial exigency. (I.C.4.2.)	Staff Report to the Commission[2]
Declaring bankruptcy. (I.C.4.1.)	Staff Report to the Commission[2]
Serious legal, financial, or ethical investigations. (I.C.5.6.)	Might require Commission monitoring[3]
Announcing closure of an institution (I.C.4.3.)	Staff Report to the Commission[2]
Disasters that jeopardize the institution's physical infrastructure. (I.C.5.4.)	Might require Commission monitoring[3]
Serious misrepresentation to students and the public. (I.C.5.7.)	Might require Commission monitoring[3]

Notes to Change Policy Chart

[1] *From Policy 1.C.3. Institutional Changes Requiring On-Site Commission Review after Their Initiation.*

The Commission includes all institutional activities within the institution's affiliation status. Because of the unique variables involved in some institutional changes, the Commission, at the request of the affiliated institution, will change the affiliation status to include the change; however, it will review the impact of the change through an on-site evaluation, either focused or comprehensive, after the effective date of the change.

[2] *From Policy 1.C.4. Institutional Activities Requiring a Staff Report to the Commission.*

Some institutional activities are of such gravity that the Commission requires that it be fully apprised of their apparent or potential consequences. At Commission expense, Commission staff will visit the institution and prepare a written report for Commission consideration. The report on closing institutions will include all teach-out arrangements; a report that involves institutional deletion of programs will also include teach-out arrangements for those programs, if appropriate. The Commission will review the report and determine appropriate action, including a call for further monitoring if necessary.

> **A note about closing institutions (Commission Policy 1.C.7).** When the governing board of an accredited institution decides to close the institution, the institution may seek from the Commission an extension of its accreditation beyond the publicly-announced date of closing. The sole purpose of the extension is to ensure that the institution's students can complete degrees and programs without undue difficulty. Extension of accreditation is typically for no longer than one year beyond the date of closing. To approve an extension of accreditation, the Commission must be assured of (1) the ongoing legal existence of the institution beyond closing, (2) the continuation of appropriate recordkeeping processes, and (3) the existence of appropriate processes to guarantee that all degrees granted after the date of closing meet the graduation requirements established by the institution.

[3] *From Policy 1.C.5. Institutional Circumstances that Might Require Commission Monitoring.*

Some circumstances might threaten the stability of the institution. The Commission's intent is to ensure those circumstances do not jeopardize the affiliation status of the institution. At the request of the institution or at the request of the Commission staff, the Commission may choose to monitor these situations through reports or on-site visits.

EVALUATING INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

☐ Timing the Submission of a Request for Institutional Change

Any affiliated institution may initiate a request for the Commission to review changes it plans to introduce at any time. **The only institutions limited in this regard are those institutions appealing a decision of the Commission.**

Since many changes require Commission action, **careful attention should be paid to the timing of the request.**

- ◇ The written request must be made early enough for the proposed change to be reviewed by the appropriate approval process (staff, Evaluators' Panel, focused visit team, comprehensive evaluation team, the review process) and the Commission to act before the date at which the institution plans to effect the change.
- ◇ Seldom can a request for institutional change receive Commission action without at least six–nine months advanced notice. Depending upon the scope of the proposed change, a longer period for review and Commission consideration may be necessary.

- The institution should write or call the Commission staff liaison early in the consideration of an institutional change to determine the review process appropriate to the change and to develop a realistic timetable for seeking approval for the change from the Commission.
- The Commission meets to take institutional actions three times each year—February, August, and November. In addition, the Commission takes action on some evaluations between meetings by mail ballot.

The institution's representative and the Commission staff liaison will need to determine when action will be needed so that, if it is approved, the change can be implemented on the schedule planned by the institution.

Information and Documentation to Support a Request for Institutional Change

The institution's written request and supporting documentation play critical roles in the Commission's decision on whether to approve or deny the requested change. However, the change in and of itself is *not* what is being accredited. Rather, the Commission considers the change within the *context of the entire institution,* deciding whether the nature or extent of the proposed change would require reconsideration of the affiliation of the institution with the Commission or whether the change could be implemented without affecting the institution's current status.

Any request for approval of institutional change must provide a well-written and comprehensive analysis of the proposed change.

1. **A concise statement of the requested change.** The statement should describe explicitly the nature of the proposed institutional change.

2. **A rationale for the requested change.** The rationale should include (a) how this change comes under the Commission's policies, and (b) why the institution has decided to initiate the change.

3. **A description of how the change is appropriate to the institution's purposes.** The request should give evidence that the proposed change is congruent with the overall mission and purposes of the institution and is a logical development of the institution at this point in its history.

4. **Consideration of how the proposed change relates to the contents of the last NCA comprehensive Team Report.** The request should describe how the proposed change would affect the scope of the institution's educational programs and activities as assessed during the last team visit. The request should note any relationship the change has to institutional strengths reported by the team. The request should address any effect the proposed change might have on any of the prior team's concerns.

5. **A description of the planning process that led to the proposed change.** Typically, a recent Needs Analysis conducted by the institution as part of this process should be included as well as other relevant planning documents. An effective Needs Analysis confirms that:

   - there is an unmet need and demand in the geographic area for the academic subjects, degrees, credentials, and/or certificates being proposed;

   - the proposed change is likely to attract, initially, and maintain over a reasonable number of years, a sufficient number of enrolled, tuition-paying students to be financially viable.

   However, the Commission does not seek to inhibit competition among institutions, and the application need only substantiate that a need for the proposed change exists.

6. **Evidence that the institution has the necessary internal and external approvals to initiate the change.**

   ◇ **Internal approvals.** An institution should state clearly how all required faculty, administrative, and governing board approvals have been obtained. Confirming documentation should be provided.

   ◇ **External approvals.** The type of external approvals needed will depend upon the state in which the institution is located or the state in which the institution has proposed to institute a change. Each state has different regulations. New overseas operations may require governmental approval, typically from a ministry of higher education. If ministry approval or government licensing is **not** required, that should be stated and documented.

   When contemplating off-campus sites or branches, the institution should contact the appropriate state higher education agency early in the planning process, especially when the branch is in a state in which the institution has not operated in the past. The institution must provide written evidence to the Commission that all legal requirements have been met. If no external approval is required, that should be stated and confirming documentation from the state provided.

7. **An analysis of the institution's continued ability to meet the General Institutional Requirements and the Criteria for Accreditation.** The request needs to address the possible effect the proposed change will have on the institution's continuing ability to meet the General Institutional Requirements and the Criteria for Accreditation.

8. **An analysis of the anticipated effect of the proposed change on the other parts of the institution.** Any time an institution makes a change, that change inevitably affects the institution's other activities. Effective requests provide evidence that the institution has taken into account potential problems. Rather than emphasizing the advantages of the proposed change, the institution should provide a critical analysis of the anticipated effect of the proposed change throughout the institution.

9. **Evidence that the institution has established the processes to assure that it has the capability to initiate and maintain the proposed change and to monitor acceptable quality once the change has been implemented.** The request should describe the decision-making processes used to conclude that the institution has the resources needed to carry out the proposed change. The request should specify how the change will be integrated into the institution's plan to document student academic achievement. If program review exists, the request should include an analysis of how systematic evaluation of the proposed change will be incorporated into the institution's established program review processes.

10. **Evidence that the institution has organized and planned for adequate human, financial, physical, and instructional resources to initiate and support the proposed change.** For all resources, the institution should clearly indicate which resources are already in place, which ones have yet to be acquired, and what strategies will be employed to acquire any necessary new resources. Successful change requests should include these elements:

    ■ **Human resources**

    ◇ a person qualified by education and experience to administer the proposed change, such as a site or new degree program;

    ◇ an administrative structure through which appropriate control can be exercised;

    ◇ the number and qualifications of administrative and support personnel needed to support the proposed change;

- ◇ the number and qualifications of faculty needed to provide the instruction required by the proposed change. Faculty vitae and/or proposed requirements are provided;
- ◇ some recruitment of administrators, faculty, or support staff has been done and persons qualified by degrees and experience have been found to teach and to serve as administrators and support staff;
- ◇ regular evaluation, using published criteria and processes comparable to those in other programs of the institution, of faculty and academic professionals (e.g., instructional designers, proctors, tutors, counselors, media specialists, etc.)

- ■ **Financial resources**
  - ◇ The financial resources are available and budgeted to cover all start-up costs as well as anticipated costs to maintain the necessary administrative, instructional, and support personnel over succeeding years.
  - ◇ An institutionally-approved projected budget for the first year of the new program that includes one-time start-up expenses, the anticipated sources of first-year funding, projected operating costs and income for at least three years, and a line item justification showing the derivation of each estimation of cost and revenue.
  - ◇ A sound business plan enumerating underlying assumptions has been received and approved by the Chief Executive Officer and the Board.
  - ◇ Sufficient financial aid is available to attract and retain students likely to succeed in the proposed program.
- ■ **Physical resources**
  - ◇ Physical facilities for lease/purchase provide appropriate space for facilities, library, and equipment, including any media to be utilized (satellite, microwave, compressed video, interactive computer, etc.).
  - ◇ Student services of the institution are available, accessible, and appropriate for the types of programs to be offered and students to be served.
- ■ **Instructional resources**
  - ◇ A coherent curriculum is documented by the syllabi of a substantial portion of the courses to be offered that include learning outcomes that can be demonstrated and assessed.
  - ◇ Admission and degree requirements for the proposed change have been developed and approved by faculty.
  - ◇ The proposed change is integrated into the institution's program for assessing student academic achievement.
  - ◇ The library core collection is adequate for faculty's course preparation and for student use.
  - ◇ Access to learning resources, including but not limited to academic and student support services, such as advising, career counseling and placement, are available and are of the quality, quantity, and type needed to support the programs to be offered.

Note: When appropriate for the proposed change, experience shows that many teams expect to see evidence that the institution has considered in its planning the principles of good practice that have been endorsed by the Commission for academic programs offered overseas and/or through distance delivery modes.

- ◇ "Principles for Good Practice in Overseas International Education Programs for Non-U.S. Nationals" (see Chapter 11)
- ◇ "Guidelines for Distance Education" (see Chapter Reference)

☐ Processes for Approval of Change Requests

Depending on the nature of a proposed change, various individuals and groups are empowered to make a recommendation to the Commission to approve an institutional change:

- **Staff process.** As specified in Commission policy, Commission staff may recommend, for Commission approval, certain types of proposed change. If the staff liaison determines that the nature of the change requires consideration by more than one person, he or she may require that the change be considered instead by an Evaluators' Panel or by an Evaluation Team.

- **Evaluators' Panel process.** An Evaluators' Panel consists of three persons drawn from the Consultant-Evaluator Corps. Each panel member is asked to conduct an independent review of the written request, to participate in a conference call among the panelists, and then to recommend either

    - ◇ that the change and, if applicable, the corresponding alteration in the SAS, be approved, or alternatively that the SISA be modified, or
    - ◇ that a focused visit by an Evaluation Team be scheduled to evaluate the change and make an independent judgment on whether or not to recommend it.

  The decision of a majority of the Panelists will be the decision of the evaluators as a group. If the Evaluators' Panel recommends a focused visit by an Evaluation Team, the institution may request that a visit be scheduled or it may withdraw its change request.

  If the request for institutional change is withdrawn, the institution must wait one year before resubmitting a request for an Evaluators' Panel review of the same change.

  Once an Evaluators' Panel recommends the approval of an institutional change, the recommendation is forwarded to the Commission for consideration at its next scheduled meeting. The Commission may require further information (and, if necessary, an evaluation visit to gather it) before acting.

- **Evaluation visit process.** An institution seeking approval for certain proposed changes can request a focused visit or use an already-scheduled comprehensive evaluation visit. Institutions that undergo focused evaluations for change have the option of having the Team Report and recommendation reviewed either by a Readers' Panel or by a Review Committee.

  When timing alone is of critical importance, an institution may request that its staff liaison bypass the review process and take the team recommendation directly to the Commission for action. This bypass is not without risk because the Commission can act only to approve or deny the change request. If the request is denied, the institution must submit a new request and undergo a new evaluation process if it wishes to pursue the change.

- **Process for approval of requests to provide a limited number of courses that are not part of degree programs.** An institution may seek to offer no more than five courses or 20 semester hours per year at its current location(s) in any calendar year.

This policy usually applies to an institution that chooses to offer a few courses beyond its level of degree (e.g., a baccalaureate institution offering a few courses that carry graduate credit) or an institution that seeks to offer a few courses outside of its stipulation (e.g., a college specifically limited to programs in the arts offering a few courses in management and business).

In determining whether to extend the accreditation of an institution to include such courses, the Commission weighs the institution's request and supporting documentation

- ◇ whether the institution intends to provide such courses on a routine and consistent basis (e.g., every summer school session);
- ◇ whether the institution has appropriate faculty and learning resources to support the courses;
- ◇ whether the institution has appropriate authorization, internal and external, for the offering of the courses; and
- ◇ whether the courses are of appropriate rigor and content.

In most situations, the staff will make the review and will carry a recommendation to the Commission. This wording–or an appropriate variation of it–will appear in the stipulation:

> *"Course offerings at the –––– level are limited to five courses or twenty semester hours a year."*

Chapter Reference

Using Guidelines and Principles Statements of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education

Frequently, with little or no warning, fundamental changes in higher education occur or new developments emerge. (Examples of such innovations include distance education, the establishment by U.S. institutions of campuses and programs abroad serving foreign nationals, changes in traditional patterns of faculty staffing, and new forms of access to library materials.) In the absence of long experience or significant expertise, institutions seeking to participate in these developments often seek external criteria by which they can assess alternatives and guide decisions. Similarly, evaluators evaluating institutions affected by changes or new developments also seek guidance in understanding the full scope of the challenges involved in mounting and conducting educational operations of quality.

To meet these demands, the Commission approves and publishes **Guidelines** and **Principles** (always prefaced by this explanation) through which it can speak to matters that deserve the scrutiny of all institutions engaged in or planning to engage in particular activities. **Guidelines** and **Principles** have received the endorsement of all of the U.S. regional accrediting commissions, and therefore reflect an emerging national consensus on good practices in specific educational areas. The Commission considers such statements to be working documents, subject to revision, and continues to review their usefulness as more is learned from institutions engaged in new initiatives, from evaluation teams, and from the broader higher education community and the public. The Commission welcomes comments on any of its **Guidelines** and **Principles**.

Since the Commission accredits institutions, not specific programs, the Commission's *Handbook of Accreditation* and other publications clearly outline the **General Institutional Requirements** and **Criteria for Accreditation** that institutions must meet to achieve and continue affiliation with the Commission. These documents also describe the change processes open to affiliated institutions. The Commission does not intend **Guidelines** and **Principles** to substitute for these official Commission policies and practices. **Guidelines** and **Principles** are intended to help those involved in planning and evaluating institutional activities identify the critical issues and make informed judgments and decisions. Accordingly, the Commission expects an institution to be aware of the issues identified in any relevant **Guidelines** and **Principles** statement, thereby providing evaluators with the information they need to establish a convincing pattern of evidence exists to support the institution's current or planned activities.

Guidelines for Distance Education

In order to facilitate the evaluation of distance education throughout the United States, the regional accrediting associations have agreed upon the following definition and guidelines. This agreement is based on an extension of the Principles developed by the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE).

DEFINITION: Distance Education is defined, for the purposes of accreditation review, as a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction occurs when student and instructor are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. Distance education may employ correspondence study, or audio, video, or computer technologies.

GUIDELINES: Any institution offering distance education is expected to meet the requirements of its own regional accrediting body, and be guided by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) Principles. In addition, an institution is expected to address, in its self-studies and/or proposals for institutional change, the following expectations, which it can anticipate will be reviewed by its regional accrediting commission.

Curriculum and Instruction

- Programs provide for timely and appropriate interaction between students and faculty, and among students.
- The institution's faculty assumes responsibility for and exercises oversight over distance education, ensuring both the rigor of programs and the quality of instruction.
- The institution ensures that the technology used is appropriate to the nature and objectives of the programs.
- The institution ensures the currency of materials, programs, and courses.
- The institution's distance education policies are clear concerning ownership of materials, faculty compensation, copyright issues, and the utilization of revenue derived from the creation and production of software, telecourses, or other media products.
- The institution provides appropriate faculty support services specifically related to distance education.
- The institution provides appropriate training for faculty who teach in distance education programs.

Evaluation and Assessment

- The institution assesses student capability to succeed in distance education programs and applies this information to admission and recruiting policies and decisions.
- The institution evaluates the educational effectiveness of its distance education programs (including assessments of student learning outcomes, student retention, and student satisfaction) to ensure comparability to campus-bases programs.
- The institution ensures the integrity of student work and the credibility of the degrees and credits it awards.

Library and Learning Resources

- The institution ensures that students have access to and can effectively use appropriate library resources.
- The institution monitors whether students make appropriate use of learning resources.
- The institution provides laboratories, facilities, and equipment appropriate to the courses or programs.

Student Services

- The institution provides adequate access to the range of student services appropriate to support the programs, including admissions, financial aid, academic advising, delivery of course materials, and placement and counseling.

- The institution provides an adequate means for resolving student complaints.
- The institution provides to students advertising, recruiting, and admissions information that adequately and accurately represents the programs, requirements, and services available.
- The institution ensures that students admitted possess the knowledge and equipment necessary to use the technology employed in the program, and provides aid to students who are experiencing difficulty using the required technology.

Facilities and Finances

- The institution possesses the equipment and technical expertise required for distance education.
- The institution's long range planning, budgeting, and policy development processes reflect the facilities, staffing, equipment, and other resources essential to the viability and effectiveness of the distance education program.

Approved by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
March 1997

13 The Commission's Candidacy Program

PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM PROCESS

Institutions of higher education considering initial affiliation with the Commission complete a Preliminary Information Form (PIF). The Commission staff uses the PIF process to screen non-affiliated institutions seeking initial status. This process does not apply to institutions currently holding candidacy or accredited status. The PIF is available on request from the Commission office.

☐ The Relationship between the GIRs and the Preliminary Information Form (PIF)

For each General Institutional Requirement (GIR), the PIF requests information and/or data and requires specific documentation to verify the institution's responses to those requests. The Commission schedules an evaluation visit after a non-affiliated institution provides, through the PIF process, convincing evidence that an Evaluation Team might be able to determine that each GIR is met.

☐ Procedure for Submitting a PIF

A fee of $1,000 must accompany the PIF. When the institution is informed that it has provided sufficient evidence in response to each GIR to justify an evaluation visit, it must pay an additional fee of $500. Both fees are non-refundable.

The staff will not begin an analysis of the PIF unless it is accompanied by these basic documents:

- ◇ catalog(s),
- ◇ handbooks,
- ◇ audited financial statements (not a compilation) for the most recently completed fiscal year, and
- ◇ certification of legal authorization to operate.

If one or more of these required documents **is not included** with the materials submitted by the institution, the materials and the fee will be returned to the institution without Commission review.

☐ Staff Analysis of the PIF

Commission staff prepare a written analysis of the information provided. That analysis is sent to the institution. If staff request additional information, no further steps will be taken until all questions have been answered.

- ◇ An institution's information will be kept on file for two years from the time of submission; during this time the institution may file revised or corrected materials without paying any additional fees.
- ◇ If two years elapse without resolution of the issues raised by Commission staff, the institution must file a new PIF and pay a new fee, if it wishes to pursue the process.

When the staff analysis shows that the institution has presented sufficient evidence in response to each GIR to justify a visit, the institution is asked to notify the Commission if and when it would like to have an evaluation visit by a team of North Central Consultant-Evaluators.

- The institution is assigned to a staff liaison.
- After conferring with the staff liaison, the institution begins to prepare a Self-Study Report in which it documents that it meets the GIRs and develops an emerging pattern of evidence that it meets the Criteria for Accreditation.
- After completion of the Self-Study Report, **which is the formal application for affiliation,** and with determination by staff that the document appears adequate for the evaluation, the evaluation visit will occur. The staff analysis of the PIF is shared with the Evaluation Team scheduled to visit the institution.

The institution must have a visit within two years of completion of the staff analysis or it will need to submit a new PIF for staff review.

Institutions in the PIF process should refrain from making any public statement that might imply a relationship with the North Central Association. The PIF process establishes no status between the institution and the Commission. The actual judgment of whether an institution meets both the General Institutional Requirements and the Criteria for Accreditation or the Candidacy Program is made through the Commission's evaluation process as described in this chapter. An institution providing information as part of the PIF process does not commit itself to an evaluation by the Commission, nor does the institution establish any affiliation with the Commission until Commission action is taken to grant candidacy or accreditation.

☐ Deciding between Initial Candidacy and Initial Accreditation

The Executive Director advises the institution of the results of the PIF process. An institution may be asked to send more information or to clarify the information it already submitted. The Executive Director will inform an institution when staff have concluded that an evaluation visit is warranted. The institution then notifies the staff liaison assigned to it when it would like to have an evaluation visit by a team of Consultant-Evaluators. At this point the institution

chooses to seek either
candidate status (initial candidacy)
or **member** status (initial accreditation);

↓

begins its self-study process;

↓

plans to conclude its self-study by
preparing an appropriate Self-Study Report.

Although an applicant institution can choose to seek either candidacy or accreditation status, most request initial candidacy. Institutions that are just getting started and have yet to graduate a class have no choice but to seek initial candidacy. Older institutions that have already graduated students face the choice.

Through experience the Commission has learned that many institutions, even those that have been operating for years, are best served through the candidacy program, even if it requires fewer than four years. The decision should be made in consultation with the Commission staff liaison. If during the self-study process an institution determines that it should seek initial accreditation instead of initial candidacy, it may change its request. Different institutions will approach this decision in different ways.

Some examples:

- Initial candidacy might be sought by a technical-vocational college that recently has been granted authority to award the associate of applied science degree. This type of institution typically needs time to develop appropriately credentialed faculty and to structure significant faculty involvement in creating and evaluating a coherent general education program.
- Initial candidacy might be sought by a bible college or a free-standing professional school that is evolving into a broad-based institution. These types of institutions typically require time to respond to such issues as governance, funding, general education, faculty credentials, and student academic and support services.
- Initial accreditation might be sought by a theological seminary that has a long history and has for many years been accredited by the Association of Theological Schools.
- Initial accreditation might be sought by a branch of an accredited university, which the legislature has decided to make into a free-standing institution.

If the institution has graduated its first class not more than one year before the Commission's evaluation, the effective date of accreditation will be the date of the graduation of the first class.

Institutions that choose to seek initial accreditation should refer to other chapters concerning institutional self-study. Those choosing to participate in the candidacy program will find specific assistance in the following pages.

OVERVIEW OF THE CANDIDACY PROGRAM

The initial candidacy process begins with an evaluation visit by a team of Consultant-Evaluators. The judgment of whether an institution meets the General Institutional Requirements and the Criteria for Accreditation is made at the conclusion of a three-step evaluation process involving a team visit, review of the Team Report and the institution's self-study materials by a Review Committee, and Commission action on the recommendations of both the Evaluation Team and the Review Committee. For institutions in candidacy, the self-study process, followed by on-site evaluation, is repeated biennially until accreditation is achieved or candidacy is withdrawn. These successive visits determine the institution's progress toward meeting each criterion by reviewing the emerging pattern of evidence presented by the institution.

The maximum length of candidacy is four years. Attainment of candidacy does not automatically assure eventual accreditation.

Expectations for All Candidate Institutions

A non-affiliated institution applying for initial status is measured against the Criteria for Accreditation. An institution seeking candidacy will document through its self-study the degree to which it meets each of the five Criteria, and **through a carefully articulated plan and timetable** will show how it will meet fully each of them within the candidacy period.

To achieve candidacy an institution will be expected to provide an emerging pattern of evidence for each criterion. In evaluating those patterns of evidence, the Commission will judge

- ◇ the **basic institutional structure and strength** as documented in the General Institutional Requirements,
- ◇ the **forthrightness and integrity** of the institution's self-study, and
- ◇ the **potential** of the institution to fulfill its plan and **achieve accreditation within four years.**

The Commission recognizes that some institutions, when they begin their candidacy, will be farther along than others in their ability to fulfill each criterion. It is possible that an institution can provide a convincing pattern of evidence that it meets three or four of the criteria, but has a sizable challenge in meeting others. It is unlikely, however, that an institution seeking candidacy status will be able to achieve accreditation within a four-year candidacy period if it does not meet any of the criteria initially.

☐ Commission Meaning of "Basic Institutional Structure and Strength"

Every institution has a structure, created by its organizational arrangements and policy documents, that supports its existence and operations. The Commission analyzes the evidence the candidate institution gives to show that it meets each General Institutional Requirement (GIR) to determine whether the institution's basic structure is sound and whether the institution meets both the letter and spirit of the GIRs.

In using the words *"basic institutional structure and strength,"* the Commission tells institutions and Evaluation Teams that difficult and important judgments must be made even in reviewing how well the institution meets the GIRs. The GIRs are so basic to the Commission's definition of its appropriate universe of institutions that the Commission is unwilling to accept, even for initial candidacy, an institution that only "marginally meets" some of the GIRs.

☐ Commission Meaning of "Forthrightness and Integrity"

Value-laden words like *forthrightness* and *integrity* present unique challenges for the institution and the Evaluation Team. The Commission takes seriously its mission of helping higher education institutions improve and remains committed to the importance of the institutional self-study process in promoting institutional improvement. Good practice dictates the following about the self-study process:

- ◇ that it be a formal, comprehensive self-examination that involves members from all internal constituencies;
- ◇ that it assists the institution in improving all aspects of itself;
- ◇ that it prepares the institution to be considered by peers for initial candidacy, continued candidacy, or initial accreditation status.

The Commission will assess whether the institution has described fully and candidly the self-study process. It will also determine the reliability of the institution's Self-Study Report, whether it accurately portrays the current state of the institution, whether it is useful as an investigative and evaluative document, and whether the plan and timetable for meeting the Criteria for Accreditation is reasonable.

Commission Expectations of the Institution's Potential "to Fulfill Its Plan"

The Commission does not prescribe a specific format for presenting either the institution's plan or its timetable for meeting all of the criteria. It does, however, expect institutions applying for initial or continued candidacy status to include a clearly identified plan and timetable as sections of the Self-Study Report. The validity of the plan rests in part on the adequacy of the institution's self-evaluation of its current strengths and its current capacity to meet each criterion.

- The plan should state the steps necessary to move the institution from its present condition to meeting each criterion fully.
- The plan should identify the individual and/or group within the institution that will assume responsibility for carrying out that step.
- The plan should offer a realistic assessment of how much time will be required to complete the step and what other steps, if any, must have taken place before the next one can begin.
- The plan should identify the resources necessary to carry out the step.

Either the plan will begin to take shape through the self-study process or those who craft the Self-Study Report should be able to assemble a plan. Some institutions have found that year-end reports measuring each year's progress toward fulfilling each of the criteria are useful in preparing the biennial self-study they must submit during the four-year candidacy period, or until they have been granted accredited status, whichever comes first.

Commission Expectations of a "Timetable"

The Commission requires that the institution demonstrate in its Self-Study Report both the steps it intends to take to meet fully each of the five criteria, and a timetable for beginning and concluding each step within the designated period. The timetable is a schematic representation of the steps the institution will take to fulfill all five criteria. It covers the total number of years the institution expects to take to achieve accreditation and specified target dates for all its steps, thus providing guidance to the institution and a measuring stick of institutional progress for the Evaluation Team. The plan is an important factor in the biennial visit as the team continues to monitor how well the institution is living up to its expectations.

Institutional Preparation of the Self-Study Report

An institution's initial self-study process concludes with its preparation of the Self-Study Report, which demonstrates, and the Evaluation Team will verify, that each of the GIRs has been met. Since the GIRs are "threshold" requirements, initial or continuing status will not be awarded unless the institution has provided explicit evidence documenting its compliance with each of these basic requirements.

An applying institution's Self-Study Report should

- provide explicit evidence that it meets all of the GIRs;
- describe its self-study process;
- present and evaluate emerging patterns of evidence it has identified to support its claim that it will meet the criteria within the candidacy period;
- include a carefully articulated plan and a reasonable timetable for completing the work that remains in order to meet the criteria fully.

The Self-Study Report demonstrates the *degree* to which the institution meets each of the five Criteria for Accreditation.

At the biennial visit, the institution must continue to document the extent to which it meets each criterion. Determination of initial and continued candidacy will rest on the ability of the institution to develop, articulate, and implement a plan and timetable to satisfy each criterion within the candidacy period. However, if the institution believes it meets the five Criteria for Accreditation before the end of the four-year period and that it can provide patterns of evidence sufficient to support that belief, it may request an evaluation for initial accreditation.

☐ Relationship of the Plan and Timetable to the Biennial Review Process

After receiving initial candidacy, the institution proceeds to implement the plan and timetable it provided to the Evaluation Team. Inevitably, institutions will need to modify or adjust that plan to accommodate modifications suggested by the Evaluation Team and/or to respond to unanticipated and changing circumstances. In the second year after it has been granted initial candidacy status, the institution reviews its original Self-Study Report and revises and updates each section according to its changed circumstances. That biennial visit not only becomes a test of the institution's progress, but also becomes a test of an institution's capacity to plan and to follow through on its plans.

The Self-Study Report for the biennial review process will

- ◇ reexamine how well the institution does or does not meet each criterion;
- ◇ describe and evaluate the progress made to date in the prior Evaluation Team's concerns and recommendations;
- ◇ add to its documentation of emerging patterns of evidence for all criteria; and
- ◇ point out any new strengths or challenges that will affect the original estimate of required resources and time before the institution will satisfy each criterion.

The process by which the institution gathers and analyzes all the above information, revises and updates its original plan and timetable, reconsiders the GIRs, and assures that it still meets all of them, is the self-study that should precede the biennial review for continued candidacy status.

If the institution is granted continuing candidacy status, it proceeds to implement the revised plan and timetable submitted as part of its Self-Study Report.

☐ Commission Meaning of "Emerging Pattern of Evidence"

In its candidacy program, the Commission expects that the extent to which a fully developed pattern of evidence for each criterion has emerged will be a function of time. By developing and carrying out a carefully articulated plan and timetable, the institution is likely to accrue the materials it needs to demonstrate that a pattern of evidence for each criterion exists, is emerging, or is evolving.

Institutions applying for initial candidacy are likely to have made progress in establishing the pattern of evidence required for several of the criteria. They might use the lists of indicators that follow each criterion to assist them in describing and evaluating their pattern of evidence. As the institution progresses through continued candidacy, it will determine what other indicators, besides those listed for each criterion, are unique to its mission and purposes and what evidence, in what combination, it will present to demonstrate emerging patterns of evidence. Each successive self-study during the candidacy period should provide additional components that contribute to an emerging pattern of evidence.

Once the candidate institution is prepared to request initial accreditation, it will have implemented fully its successive plans and timetables. The Self-Study Report it submits with its application for member status will respond to the specific concerns of all previous Evaluation Teams and Review Committee(s) and document that it meets both the GIRs and all five Criteria for Accreditation.

☐ The Team Report in the Candidacy Program

A team of Consultant-Evaluators makes an evaluation visit to an institution as the first of the three-part process of considering whether or not to grant or to continue candidacy status to an institution. Whether the request is for initial candidacy or for the continuation of candidacy, the Evaluation Team must review and evaluate the Self-Study Report, both narrative and supporting documentation, particularly scrutinizing the modifications in the plan and timetable resulting from changed circumstances during the preceding two years.

Team Reports for **initial candidacy** must make the case that

- the GIRs are met (explicit commentary on each of the GIRs is required);
- the institution has engaged in a useful and productive self-study process; and
- the Self-Study Report
  - is an evaluative document,
  - contains a carefully articulated plan and timetable, and
  - documents the degree to which the institution meets the five Criteria for Accreditation.

Team Reports for **continued candidacy,** in addition to the above, will

- provide evidence of progressive development and improvement at the institution and
- evaluate how the institution has responded to the concerns and recommendations provided by the previous Evaluation Team and Review Committee.

While the Commission does not grant candidacy to an institution unless it has strong evidence that the institution can achieve accreditation within the candidacy period, it cannot guarantee that institutions will, in fact, achieve the goals they set for themselves.

Therefore, the Evaluation Team considering continued candidacy must evaluate and their report address whether the institution is evolving patterns of evidence needed to achieve accreditation before the end of the candidacy period. If the institution must modify its plans, or if it fails to fulfill some of its plans, then the Evaluation Team bears the responsibility of determining whether continued candidacy is appropriate.

☐ Review Processes and Commission Action

Evaluations for initial and continued candidacy proceed through the same levels of review as evaluations for initial or continued accreditation.

- Review of the documents by a Readers' Panel (permitted for continued candidacy evaluations) or a Review Committee (required for initial candidacy evaluations).
- Final review and action by the Commission.

The review processes and Commission action are described in detail in Chapter 9.

14 Special Focus: The Commission's Federal Compliance Program

THE FEDERAL COMPLIANCE PROGRAM

The 1992 Amendments to the Higher Education Reauthorization Act put into law several requirements for accrediting agencies that seek federal recognition. The Commission has held and will continue to hold federal recognition as an approved accrediting agency. Through this recognition, the Commission's affiliated institutions qualify for a variety of federal financial aid programs.

The Commission gave careful attention to the new mandates of the law and to the Department of Education's implementation of the law through its revised recognition requirements. Several of the new mandates required minor changes in policies and procedures. In February 1996, the Commission voted to make those changes. Other requirements called for new policies and procedures, which the Commission also approved in February.

☐ Institutional and Team Responsibilities

The Self-Study Report (either in the main body or in an addendum) and the Team Report each will have a special section entitled "Federal Compliance." In it the institution and team will address the following Commission policies:

- ◇ Credits, Program Length, and Tuition (I.C.9.)
- ◇ Institutional Compliance with the Higher Education Reauthorization Act (I.A.5.)
- ◇ Institution's Advertising and Recruitment Materials (IV.B.2.)
- ◇ Professional Accreditation (III.A.1.)
- ◇ Requirements of Institutions Holding Dual Institutional Accreditation (III.A.3.)

These policies are listed and discussed in the sections that follow.

- **I.C.9. Credits, Program Length, and Tuition** (effective 9/1/96)

Commission policy states:

> The Commission expects an affiliated institution to be able to equate its learning experiences with semester or quarter credit hours using practices common to institutions of higher education, to justify the lengths of its programs in comparison to similar programs found in accredited institutions of higher education, and to justify any program-specific tuition in terms of program costs, program length, and program objectives. Affiliated institutions notify the Commission of any significant changes in the relationships among credits, program length, and tuition.

The key components of this policy address

- ◇ an institution's ability to provide semester or quarter credit hour equivalencies for transcripted courses (courses on transcripts, for example, that provide narrative evaluation or that simply list courses completed); and
- ◇ the institution's ability to justify any "program-specific tuition."

The comparison of program length is addressed to a large extent in General Institutional Requirement #15, but restated in this policy for clarity and completeness.

If an institution does not use semester or quarter credit hours as the basic measure of its learning experiences, it will need to explain—in its catalog, student handbook, or self-study—how it calculates equivalencies. The team will want to be sure that the equivalencies seem to be reasonable, and are understood and uniformly applied within the institution.

If an institution charges for some of its programs higher or lower tuition than the tuition paid by most students, then it will need to justify—in its catalog, student handbook, or self-study—the tuition in terms of program costs, program length, and program objectives. It will also need to provide evidence to the team that it provides to prospective students good information about tuition and fees.

The federal concern about tuition appears to be two-fold:

◇ Does the institution provide clear, comparative consumer information?

◇ Is the institution charging program-specific tuition significantly out-of-line with either the potential salaries that graduates might reasonably be expected to earn or with differential costs of the program?

Institutions and teams need to keep those concerns in mind. A team should never appear to dictate appropriate tuition for an institution or its programs, but it can draw attention to misleading or incomplete disclosure of tuition and fees.

■ I.A.5. Institutional Compliance with the Higher Education Reauthorization Act (effective 9/1/96)

Commission policy states:

> The Commission expects that its affiliated institutions comply if required with the Title IV requirements of the Higher Education Reauthorization Act as amended in 1992. Therefore, institutions will provide teams for review and consideration the most recent default rates (and any default reduction plans approved by the Department of Education) and any other documents concerning the institution's program responsibilities under Title IV of the Act, including any results of financial or compliance audits and program reviews.
>
> The teams weigh the information and its relationship to the General Institutional Requirements, Criteria for Accreditation, and/or the requirements of the Candidacy program.
>
> The Commission reserves the right to review an institution's status when the Department of Education findings have proven significant noncompliance with the Act.

All institutions receiving Title IV funds will need to prepare for the Team Room copies of documents relevant to Title IV compliance (or at minimum a clear index of where those documents might be readily found in institutional files). The Self-Study Report should evaluate the institution's default rate, if any, and its plans for reducing default. If reauthorization, program audits, or any other Department of Education action raises significant issues, the institution will want to address those issues in the Self-Study Report. It is a matter of institutional integrity that institutions provide all relevant documents for the team.

Teams will study the materials related to Title IV compliance to determine whether the institution's status with the Department of Education in any way affects its status with the Commission. Clearly, if the fiscal stability of the institution is in jeopardy or if audits highlight significant lapses in integrity, the team must determine how the institution's relationship with the Commission should be affected. Monitoring through reports or focused visits might be appropriate; in exceptional circumstances a team might consider probation or withdrawal of status. Should the team discover that the institution has failed to meet its Title IV responsibilities or is engaged in fraud and abuse, the Commission has an affirmative responsibility to provide this information to the Department of Education.

■ IV.B.2. Institution's Advertising and Recruitment Materials

The critical new component of this policy is in its second paragraph:

> Whenever an institution makes reference to its affiliation with the Commission, it will include the Commission's address and telephone number.

The initial purpose of this policy was to make clear to institutions and to teams the Commission's concern about accurate consumer information, particularly advertising and recruiting materials. Apparently the DOE has added this requirement to make sure consumers know how to contact the accrediting agency with questions or concerns. Implementation of the policy also is addressed in Chapter 15.

■ III.A.1. Professional Accreditation

Two policies (III.A.1. Professional Accreditation and III.A.3. Requirements of Institutions Holding Dual Institutional Accreditation) draw attention to the Commission's decision to incorporate the activities of other accrediting associations into its decision-making processes. These policies define two specific situations that are of concern to the Commission:

- ◇ where an institution holds specialized accreditation with a single agency the status of which covers one-third or more of either the institution's offerings or its students, and
- ◇ where an institution is also accredited by another **institutional** accrediting body.

Commission policy now states that in both situations, when notified of an adverse action taken by another agency, the Commission will review the rationale for the adverse action and determine whether further institutional review is appropriate. If the Commission takes an adverse action against the institution, it will notify the other agency within 30 working days. Federal law and policy dictate sharing of specific information among accrediting associations and call for all agencies to include that information as appropriate in deliberations.

- ◇ An institution is responsible for keeping the Commission informed of its status with other accreditors, typically through the Annual Report. But during the self-study process, an institution will want to review its programmatic accreditations. If an agency has taken an adverse action affecting a significant portion of an institution (that is, if it affected one-third or more of the institution's offerings or one-third or more of the institution's students), the institution needs to provide a full analysis of the impact of the action.
- ◇ A team will review the specialized accreditation held by an institution, reviewing as appropriate team reports and final action letters. If an agency has taken an adverse action affecting a significant portion of an institution (see above), the team needs to decide how or whether that action should influence the Commission's status. Progress or monitoring reports might be required in most situations; for some single purpose institutions more stringent monitoring might be appropriate.

POLICY AND PROCEDURE FOR UNANNOUNCED INSPECTIONS

☐ Purpose of the Inspections

The United States Higher Education Act as amended in 1992 and codified at 20 U.S.C. § 1099b and the United States Department of Education regulations at 34 C.F.R. § 602.24 governing recognition of accrediting agencies require that the Commission conduct unannounced inspections of its affiliated institutions. These unannounced inspections will take place at institutions that participate in Title IV student financial aid and offer pre-baccalaureate vocational education.

The purpose of these inspections as defined by the regulations is to determine whether an institution has the personnel, facilities, and resources it claimed to have either at the time of its last on-site review or in subsequent reports to the Commission. The unannounced inspection is for this very limited purpose only: it is not comprehensive or even focused in nature. There will be no Evaluation Team. An individual "inspector" will make the inspection.

The unannounced site inspection process is conducted separately from all other Commission processes.

☐ Commission Policy on Unannounced Inspections

The Commission policy on Federally-Mandated Unannounced Inspections states:

> The Commission complies with federal law by conducting unannounced inspections of institutions offering pre-baccalaureate vocational programs as defined by the Department of Education. The unannounced site inspection process is conducted separately from all other Commission processes. The Commission will observe its Conflict of Interest Policy (II.B.3) in assigning persons to conduct an inspection; however, the Commission may assign a person to inspect an institution located within that inspector's home state.
>
> The "Policy and Procedures for Unannounced Inspections" document, which contains those policies and procedures applicable to the inspection process, is provided to all institutions that might be inspected and to the public on request.

☐ Institutions to Be Inspected

Unannounced inspections will only be made at institutions that offer pre-baccalaureate vocational education and participate in Title IV student financial aid. The Secretary of Education defines vocational education as follows:

> an instructional program, below the bachelor's level, designed to prepare individuals with the skills and training required for employment in a specific trade, occupation or profession related to the instructional program. 34 C.F.R. § 602.2 (1996).

The Secretary chose this definition because it is the same as the one used by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems (IPEDS) glossary definition of an "occupationally specific program":

> (T)he IPEDS inventory of occupationally specific programs provides a list of instructional programs which, if offered by an institution, subject the institution to an unannounced inspection by its accrediting agency. Secretary's Procedures and Criteria for Recognition of Accrediting Agencies, 59 Fed. Reg. 22,252 (1994).

Using IPEDS data and information reported by institutions on the Annual Report, the Commission identifies those institutions to be inspected during an academic year. Only a portion of the membership will be inspected each year. Those selected may include community colleges, technical colleges, and comprehensive colleges and universities that offer pre-baccalaureate, occupationally-specific programs. The Commission will also include both for-profit and not-for-profit institutions in its sample. Unless and until the law is changed, any institution that indicates pre-baccalaureate, occupationally-specific programs in its IPEDS report should expect that it may have an unannounced inspection in the future.

At the beginning of the academic year the Commission will mail to institutions that offer occupationally-specific programs in states where the inspection program will be active that year general information about the inspection program and a copy of the form that the inspector will complete in the event of an inspection. The institution will also have an opportunity to notify the Commission that it should not be inspected because it does not offer occupationally-specific Associate or Certificate programs as outlined in the Department of Education regulations.

Institutions will receive no notice about an upcoming inspection. **Inspections are totally unannounced.** Inspectors will try to avoid arriving on campus while students are on break or during exam periods, but in most cases the inspector will not know the schedule of events on campus. Institutions should be prepared to receive an inspector at any time.

☐ Inspectors

Inspectors are individuals familiar with Commission policy and procedures and may be current staff or Consultant-Evaluator Corps; inspectors may also be retired Consultant-Evaluators or staff. The Commission will observe its Conflict of Interest Policy in assigning persons to conduct an inspection; however, the Commission may assign a person to inspect an institution located within that inspector's home state. Moreover, inspectors will be asked prior to the inspection to disclaim any actual conflict of interest such as personal bias or personal relationship.

☐ Materials for the Visit

Prior to the inspection, inspectors will receive from the Commission office

- the most recent team reports (last comprehensive and subsequent focused visit, if any);
- staff analysis, if appropriate, for any progress, monitoring, or contingency reports;
- the catalog on file with NCA; and
- the latest Institutional Annual Report.

After the inspection, the institution may, upon request, receive a set of the materials the Commission mailed to the inspector.

Institutions should have available

- the Self-Study Report and Basic Institutional Data form completed for the most recent comprehensive evaluation;
- progress/monitoring reports or focused visit reports, if any, filed with the Commission since the last comprehensive evaluation;
- the most recent institutional catalog;

- the most recent financial audit;
- the current budget; and
- a list of current faculty that includes: academic education; summary of professional experience; license status, if appropriate; year hired; and full/part-time designation.

NOTE: Only since 1994 has the Commission saved institutional documents after the visit process has concluded. Therefore, the Commission must rely on the institution's copies for this inspection. If these documents cannot be located, the CEO should call the Commission office as soon as possible.

Inspectors also receive a checklist and review form to complete as the inspection progresses.

☐ What CEOs Can Do to Be Ready

Since the inspections are unannounced, the Commission does not expect institutions to have prepared formally for the inspection. However, CEOs may make the following preparations in the event that the institution does receive an unannounced inspection:

- have readily accessible the documents noted above;
- designate a person who is usually on campus to be available to represent the institution in case the CEO is out of the office or normally occupied with activities that cannot easily be set aside. The designee should be available to assist the inspector throughout the day by locating/interpreting appropriate documents and arranging meetings with college personnel, if requested;
- prepare a plan for a campus tour, with the institutional representative accompanying, that will enable the inspector to see the facilities provided in support of the vocational programs.

☐ Protocol for the Inspection

The inspector will review only the pre-baccalaureate occupational program and resources related to it. Resources for this program may not always be easily separated from resources for other institutional programs; however, the inspector will confine the inspection to this area wherever possible.

The inspector will normally begin an inspection by introducing himself/herself to the CEO or to the person identified by the CEO to represent the institution. If the CEO is out of the office and unable to be contacted, the inspector will speak to this designee or to the next administrative officer in the chain of command, if no designee is appointed. The designated representative should be responsible for helping the inspector easily locate appropriate documents and personnel.

The inspector and his/her contact at the institution will begin by agreeing on those programs appropriate to the scope of the inspection: pre-baccalaureate, occupationally-specific programs. Using the Self-Study Report, Team Report, and related documents, the inspector will identify the personnel, facilities, and resources related to these programs that the last team observed and now need to be verified.

The inspector typically will tour the physical facilities, interview faculty and administrators, and examine other written information pertaining to current institutional resources for these programs. The inspection should not take more than a few hours if the institution has documents readily available and appropriate interviews can be scheduled. If the institution offers only a single vocational program, the visit need not take more than two hours in many cases. The institution should keep in mind that, as the inspector's time is limited, it should try to accommodate the inspector's requests for information as quickly as possible.

☐ Inspector's Review Form

The inspector will complete the review form and return it to the Commission office within two weeks of the inspection.

- ◇ If the institution appears to have the resources it claimed to have at the time of the last team visit, the process will be at an end. The form will not become a part of the institution's permanent file nor will it be mailed to the next team.
- ◇ If the institution does **not** appear to have the resources it claimed or if the inspector makes other significant findings as indicated on the review form, the Commission staff person will work with the institution to gather further information as needed.

In either case, the CEO of the institution will receive a copy of the inspector's completed form and will have the opportunity to respond to it if he/she wishes. If the Commission staff believes further formal review is necessary based on the inspector's review and on any additional information gathered, the staff person will make a recommendation to the Commission. Only the Commission can determine whether such monitoring should be implemented. If the Commission formally recommends such monitoring, the inspector's form, together with the formal recommendation of the staff person, may become a part of the permanent file and be sent to the next on-site team.

15 Informing the Public

THE COMMISSION'S EXPANDING VIEW OF PUBLIC DISCLOSURE

Demands on the Commission for greater public disclosure of information, about its processes in general and about individual affiliated institutions in particular, have increased in recent years. Some demands have come from the federal government in the form of new pressures for access to information from the Commission's evaluation processes.

The Commission is responding to these demands in several significant ways, particularly through the development and publication of the Record of Status and Scope (see Chapter 2). It is increasing its efforts to communicate, in a timely and useful manner, with other agencies such as the Department of Education and state higher education agencies. The *Briefing* newsletter and the *Overview* brochure both provide useful information about the Commission's activities to a variety of constituents. It has developed Public Disclosure Notices that give information about specific situations at individual institutions. The Commission's new Web site offers the public easier access to current information.

In addition, the Commission has strengthened its concerns about public disclosure practices on the part of affiliated institutions by revising relevant components of both its General Institutional Requirements and Criteria for Accreditation. Advertising, recruiting, publication of affiliation, use of Team Reports, and reporting of Commission actions are among the important institutional obligations related to the public. The Commission has taken some important steps regarding public information; issues of public information and public disclosure will continue to be on the Commission's agenda for several years.

COMMISSION DISCLOSURE

☐ Publication of Affiliation by the Commission

Each year in the Fall issue of the *NCA Quarterly* the Commission publishes a Record of Status and Scope (RSS) for each of its affiliated institutions. The RSS includes the Statement of Affiliation Status most recently approved by the Commission and the Statement of Institutional Scope and Activities (SISA) created from the most recent Institutional Annual Report. A sample RSS appears in Chapter 2. However, in making the RSS a public document, the Commission determined that it would disclose the dates but not the substance of required reports and scheduled focused evaluations, since that detail serves specific internal purposes and might be confusing or misleading to those outside the process.

The Commission staff will disclose the entire Statement of Affiliation Status only with an institution's approval; however, the entire SAS of an institution on probation is available on request from the Commission after the institution has been notified officially of its probation.

Supplements to the *NCA Quarterly* are produced after each Commission meeting at which institutional actions are taken; each edition of the *Briefing* contains a record of the most recent actions. Each year the Commission publishes in the *Briefing* a summary of all of the actions it has taken in the previous year. Moreover, interested persons can obtain current information on the Commission's Web site or by calling or faxing the Commission office.

☐ Sharing Information with Other Agencies

The Commission shares information with other accrediting agencies and with federal and state departments of education. Following each Commission meeting, the Commission files with these agencies a report of all institutional actions taken. In early fall, the Commission furnishes state agencies with the list of institutions scheduled for evaluation in that academic year.

Although the Commission tries to respond cooperatively to requests for information from other agencies, it is primarily the institution's responsibility to maintain effective communication with these agencies and to provide them with appropriate information concerning its relationship with the North Central Association.

☐ Public Distribution of the Team Report by the Commission

In most cases, the Commission will not make a Team Report public without the permission of the institution. However, the Commission will make the Team Report public if it finds that the institution has misrepresented the contents of the report either through public statements or through the release of selected portions of the report.

☐ Public Disclosure Notice

The Commission may issue a Public Disclosure Notice regarding an affiliated institution when circumstances warrant. This notice will include a history of the institution's relationship with the Commission as well as a brief analysis of the situation that prompted the Notice. An institution may request that a Public Disclosure Notice be made available to the public or the Commission may produce a Public Disclosure Notice that will be available to the public. The notice is shared with the institution before it is made available to the public.

INSTITUTIONAL DISCLOSURE

☐ Institutional Advertising

In its General Institutional Requirements, the Commission requires that an affiliated institution provide fair and accurate information regarding its programs and its policies affecting students. The Commission's Criteria for Accreditation include a specific criterion that addresses institutional integrity: Criterion Five. Teams expect to find that institutional publications, statements, and advertising accurately describe the institution, its operations, and its programs. If an institution's affiliation status extends to include distant sites, including international operations, the institution is responsible for the advertising and recruitment materials for those sites. This is especially critical when institutions develop linkages and enter into contractual agreements through which another party may appear, in advertising, to lay claim to an affiliated institution's status with the Commission.

The Commission has a specific policy addressing its concern about misleading advertising:

> When it is determined that an institution is in violation of the Commission's policy on fair and accurate public disclosure, the Executive Director informs the institution through a formal letter. If the violation is not corrected, the Executive Director shall report the matter to the Commission for appropriate action.

☐ Publication of Affiliation by the Institution

The North Central Association is a membership organization whose members are the institutions accredited by a Commission of the Association; thus "member institution" and "accredited institution" are synonymous. Reference to "membership" is limited to accredited institutions; candidate institutions are not "members" of the North Central Association, although they are affiliated with it.

The Commission requires that specific language be used whenever the institution refers to its status with the Commission in catalogs, advertisements, brochures, and other publications.

An institution that is	should use the following language
unaffiliated	**should make no reference** to affiliation with the Commission until a status has been granted by the Commission.
accredited	*"(Name of Institution) is accredited by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools."* North Central accreditation refers to the institution as a whole. Statements such as "this program is accredited by North Central" or "this degree is accredited by North Central" are incorrect and must not be used. Moreover, the phrases "**fully** accredited" or "**full** accreditation" **must not be used,** since **no partial accreditation is possible.**
a candidate for accreditation	*"(Name of Institution) is a candidate for accreditation with the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools."*
on Probation **must disclose this sanction whenever it refers to its NCA accreditation.**	*"(Name of Institution) is accredited by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The institution is on Probation as of (date of Probation action.)"*

In keeping with Federal requirements, whenever an institution makes reference to its affiliation with the Commission, it will include the Commission's address and telephone number. The Commission strongly urges the careful placement of this information so as not to confuse the public about where to contact for institutional information. For most institutions, the policy probably will mean that the next copy of the catalog will need to contain the Commission's address and telephone number. For institutions that publicize heavily their affiliation with the Commission–through mention of their status in advertisements, in recruiting brochures and/or on letterhead–a decision must be made whether to continue the practice or to add the Commission's address and telephone number.

Institutions will need to study their printed materials to determine when and how their status with the Commission is mentioned. When reviewing institutional materials, a team will want to check whether an institution adheres to this policy. If it does not, the team should call the omission to the institution's attention; in a few situations, the team may recommend that the institution to submit a report documenting that it corrected the error.

An institution may disclose its Statement of Affiliation Status as long as it provides the Record of Status and Scope in its entirety. **In no case should an institution use the logo of the North Central Association.**

☐ Public Distribution of the Team Report by the Institution

The Commission encourages an institution to distribute the **entire** Team Report and recommendations to all of its constituencies. However, if it distributes the report before the Commission takes action, the institution must indicate that the Team Report does not constitute a summary of the entire North Central evaluation process, but is only the first step in the evaluation process. Because the Commission's review processes may result in an accrediting action other than the one the Evaluation recommended, misunderstandings may occur if the preliminary nature of the Team Report is not made clear either through public statements or through release of selected sections of the report..

After final Commission action, each institution may make public the entire Team Report or excerpts that are accurate (i.e., verbatim or reasonable paraphrases) and that correctly reflect the entire report. **If it distributes excerpts, the institution must make the full report available on request.** The Commission will not make the report public without the permission of the institution, unless an institution misrepresents it either through public statements or through release of selected sections of the report.

☐ Publication of Commission Action by the Institution

When the institution reports a Commission action it may simply state that accreditation has been continued. However, if the institution wishes to disclose further details of the action, such as the scheduled year of the next comprehensive evaluation, it should also disclose the other details of the action, including any reports or focused evaluations required as a part of the action.

In addition, phrases such as ***"accreditation has been continued for a ten-year period"*** **should never be used.** North Central Association accreditation is not for a specific period of time but is a continuing relationship between the institution and the Association that is subject to reconsideration periodically or when necessary. The timing of the next comprehensive evaluation is subject to alteration if significant changes occur in an institution.

COMPLAINTS AGAINST AFFILIATED INSTITUTIONS

In fulfilling its responsibility to the public, the Commission receives complaints about its affiliated institutions. A Commission policy defines how the Commission will handle all complaints that it receives.

> The Commission, aware of its obligations to the public, receives complaints against its affiliated institutions, pursues only those that bear upon the institution's meeting of the General Institutional Requirements and/or the Criteria for Accreditation, and responds to complainants in a timely manner. The Commission acknowledges a complaint promptly and within thirty working days of receipt advises the complainant whether or not the complaint warrants consideration by the Commission. Because the Commission usually does not act upon complaints that are being pursued through other avenues such as institutional grievance processes and/or governmental courts or agencies, it expects individuals with individual, personal complaints to use other grievance mechanisms, particularly the internal grievance procedures of the institution. In addition to pursuing complaints, the Commission may initiate an inquiry in response to any information that gives reason to be concerned about the institution's meeting one or more of the General Institutional Requirements or Criteria for Accreditation.

When the Commission receives a written, signed complaint,

- ◇ it seeks the complainant's permission to forward the complaint to the president of the named institution. (If confidentiality is an issue, the complainant may request that the Commission summarize the complaint and keep the name confidential.)
- ◇ If the complaint raises issues of concern to the Commission, a Commission staff person will ask the institutional president to respond to the Commission. If the institution's response indicates that it is fulfilling the Commission's General Institutional Requirements and Criteria for Accreditation, a Commission staff person notifies the institution and the complainant that the Commission will take no further action on the complaint. If the institution's response is

inadequate, the staff person may ask for documentation of corrective measures, or may call for an on-site visit to gather information, or may take the complaint to the Commission for review and action.

- ◇ A staff person will forward other complaints to the institutional president so that the CEO may know that the Commission is aware of the complaint and may try to resolve the misunderstandings.
- ◇ A Commission staff person will advise the complainant and the institution of the Commission's response to the complaint.

The policy on complaints against the Commission appears in Chapter 1.

Appendices

Appendix A

Rules of Procedure of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education

☐ Rule 1: Name and Authority

This organization shall be known as the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education ("the Commission") of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools ("the Association"). It is established under the Constitution of the Association, and derives its powers from the Constitution. These Rules of Procedure are intended to provide for fulfilling the responsibilities placed on the Commission by the Constitution.

☐ Rule 2: Composition of the Commission

a. The Commission shall comprise fifteen persons called Commissioners: three persons representative of the public and twelve persons broadly representative of institutions of higher education that are members of the Association. All Commissioners shall be residents of a state within the geographic territory of the Association. The Commission's representative officer to the Association Board of Directors shall serve as an ex-officio member of the Commission.

b. Each Commissioner who is representative of the public shall have no current active affiliation with an institution of higher education or higher education agency in the geographic territory of the Association.

c. Each Commissioner who is representative of institutions of higher education shall hold a full time position at a member institution of higher education of the Association.

d. Each Commissioner shall serve a term of four years unless the term is extended because of election as an officer of the Commission. Terms shall begin on January 1. Approximately one-fourth of the terms expire each year. A Commissioner shall serve until a successor assumes office.

e. No person shall be appointed or reappointed to a term or a portion of a term as a Commissioner if by completion of that appointment the person will have served more than seven years as a Commissioner. Officers elected by Commissioners shall serve until the completion of their office but not more than eight years. (See Rule 6d.)

☐ Rule 3: Manner of Action

a. The Commission may adopt policies as it may deem necessary and convenient to exercise the powers and discharge the duties of the Commission that are specified in the Constitution of the Association.

b. Unless otherwise specified in the Constitution of the Association, these Rules of Procedure, or the policies of the Commission, the Commission itself shall take such actions as are required by the Constitution of the Association, or are necessary for the conduct of Commission business.

Note: The following powers and duties of the Commission are specified in the Constitution of the Association, and are inserted here for reference:

a. *To develop accreditation processes which encourage quality and educational excellence.*

b. *To stimulate improvement of educational programs and effectiveness of instruction, with concern for freedom to teach and learn.*

c. *To establish policies and procedures by which the activities of the Commission shall be carried out, including the selection of officers and committees for the Commission.*

d. *To establish criteria which, when met, entitle educational institutions to receive the status of accreditation, and to establish procedures by which the determination of accreditation is made.*

e. *To establish criteria which, when met, entitle educational institutions to be affiliated with the Association in ways other than membership, and to establish procedures by which the determination of such affiliation is made.*

f. *To use the name of the Association in the conduct of Commission activities and on Commission publications.*

g. *To publish the* **NCA Quarterly** *as well as books, pamphlets and other materials needed to carry out Commission activities.*

h. *To employ persons in the name of the Association.*

i. *To assess dues and fees to be paid by member and other affiliated institutions, to receive such dues and fees, and after reasonable notice to withdraw accreditation or other affiliation for non-payment of such dues and fees.*

j. *To disburse funds and otherwise manage the financial affairs of the Commission, but the amount expended by a Commission during a year shall not exceed the revenue it receives during that year plus any amount remaining from the operations of previous years.*

c. Adoption of institutional actions must be taken at a Commission meeting and shall require a majority of those present and voting. Adoption of Commission policies must be taken at a Commission meeting and shall require a majority of Commissioners.

d. The Commission may not act to adopt or change any criterion by which the accreditation or other affiliation of an institution is judged until such proposed criteria or changes have been circulated for comment to all institutions affiliated with the Association through the Commission at least one month before the action is taken. Any comment received must be considered by the Commission before action is taken.

☐ Rule 4: Meetings of the Commission

a. The Commission shall meet at least twice each year.

b. The Commission shall meet within the geographic territory of the Association at such times and places as the Commission shall designate.

c. Notice of a meeting of the Commission shall be provided to each Commissioner at least sixty days in advance of the meeting, and may be provided to other persons by publication or in response to inquiry. The notice of meeting shall state the time and place of the meeting. In case of an emergency, the Commission may hold a meeting without sixty days advance notice, provided there is unanimous agreement of the Commissioners to waive such notice.

d. Meetings of the Commission shall not be open to the public at large, but the Commission may adopt policies permitting persons not members of the Commission to attend part or all of Commission meetings.

e. The Commission may take action on any matter within its authority by mail ballot or by a conference using telecommunications under such rules as it may prescribe, provided that no action shall be adopted by fewer than ten affirmative votes.

f. Unless otherwise provided in these Rules or the Constitution of the Association, the meetings of the Commission shall be conducted according to *Robert's Rules of Order, Revised.*

☐ Rule 5: Record of Actions

a. All actions establishing or modifying the affiliation of an institution with the Association through the Commission shall be transmitted in written form to the designated executive officer of the institution promptly after the action has been taken.

b. The Commission shall cause to be prepared and maintained a permanent record of all its actions, and shall distribute that record or make it available for inspection to representatives of member institutions of higher education of the Association, to the Board of Directors of the Association and to such other persons or groups as the Commission may designate.

☐ Rule 6: Officers of the Commission

a. The officers of the Commission shall be a Chair and a Vice Chair.

b. The term of office of each officer shall be two years, beginning on January 1.

c. Officers shall be elected as necessary from among the Commissioners by majority vote of the Commission at least two months before the beginnings of the terms of office.

d. If a person is chosen as an officer, the term of that person as a Commissioner shall, if necessary, automatically be extended until completion of service as an officer, so long as that person meets the requirements for service as a Commissioner.

e. The Chair of the Commission shall preside at all meetings of the Commission, and shall perform other duties required by these Rules or the Constitution of the Association, or customary to the office.

f. The Vice Chair shall perform the duties of the Chair in the absence of the Chair.

g. If the Chair is permanently unable to perform the duties of office, the Vice Chair shall succeed to the office of Chair to complete the unexpired term. In this event a new Vice Chair shall be elected promptly by the Commission to complete the unexpired term of the Vice Chair.

☐ Rule 7: Executive Committee of the Commission

a. There shall be an Executive Committee of the Commission which shall have the power to act for the Commission between meetings of the Commission. The powers of the Executive Committee shall be defined in policies adopted by the Commission and shall not contravene the requirements of Rule 3c. All actions of the Executive Committee shall be reported to the Commission at its next meeting.

b. The Executive Committee shall comprise the officers of the Commission and at least two but no more than three other Commissioners elected for one year terms beginning on January 1.

c. Members of the Executive Committee are elected by the Commission at the last scheduled Commission meeting of the calendar year preceding the start of their terms. Members of the Executive Committee shall serve until their successors assume office.

☐ Rule 8: Accreditation Review Council

a. There shall be an Accreditation Review Council which comprises at least 60 individuals.

b. Each Council member shall be a full time active appointee of a member institution of higher education of the Association and a resident of a state within the geographic territory of the Association.

c. The membership of the Accreditation Review Council shall meet the following conditions:

i. There shall be at least two persons resident in each state within the geographic territory of the Association.

ii. There shall be at least fifteen persons from institutions in each of the four degree levels:

- ◇ highest degree less than bachelor's;
- ◇ highest degree bachelor's;
- ◇ highest degree above bachelor's but less than doctor's;
- ◇ highest degree doctor's.

iii. There shall be at least thirty persons from public institutions, and at least thirty persons from private institutions.

d. Approximately one-fourth of the terms shall expire in any one year.

e. No one may serve through appointment and/or reappointment more than six consecutive years as a Council member.

f. Council members shall participate actively in the procedures by which institutions of higher education gain or retain affiliation with the Association. This participation shall be defined in policies adopted by the Commission.

☐ Rule 9: Standing Committee on Appointments

a. There shall be a standing Committee on Appointments which shall appoint by majority vote persons to serve as Commissioners and as Accreditation Review Council members.

b. The Committee on Appointments shall comprise seven persons, as follows:

i. Three Commissioners, who shall not be officers of the Commission; and

ii. Four chief executive officers of institutions of higher education that are members of the Association, who shall be neither Commissioners nor Accreditation Review Council members.

c. Members of the Committee on Appointments shall be appointed to one year terms by the Commission at the meeting of the Commission first occurring after January 1, and shall serve until successors have been appointed.

d. The membership of the Committee on Appointments shall meet the following conditions:

i. There shall be at least one person from an institution in each of the four degree levels:

- ◇ highest degree less than bachelor's;
- ◇ highest degree bachelor's;
- ◇ highest degree above bachelor's but less than doctor's;
- ◇ highest degree doctor's.

ii. There shall be at least two members from public institutions, and at least two members from private institutions;

   iii. There shall be no more than one member from a single state;

   iv. No one shall be appointed to more than one term on the Committee on Appointments within any four year period.

e. Appointments of persons to full terms as Commissioners or as Accreditation Review Council members shall be made by the Committee on Appointments not less than three nor more than six months before the beginning of the respective terms.

f. In the event of vacancies arising among the Commissioners, the Committee on Appointments shall promptly appoint persons to fill the unexpired terms.

☐ Rule 10: Chief Executive Officer

a. The Commission shall appoint a chief executive officer of the Commission, who shall be a full time employee of the Association.

b. The chief executive officer shall have such title as the Commission shall designate, and shall serve such term of office and under such conditions of employment as the Commission shall determine.

c. The chief executive officer shall have primary responsibility for administering the activities of the Commission under the direction of the Commission.

☐ Rule 11: Amendments to the Rules of Procedure

These Rules of Procedure shall be amended by action of the Commission only after the proposed amendment has been circulated for comment to all institutions affiliated with the Association through the Commission at least one month before the action to adopt is taken. Each comment received must be considered by the Commission before action is taken.

Adopted: January 1, 1984
Amended: August 25, 1989

Appendix B

Resources on Topics in Higher Education

The Commission staff has found the books and articles listed below to be helpful for institutions working on self-study and assessment. These readings represent only a small portion of the literature currently available on these topics. Most of the publications listed have bibliographies. Many of the agencies listed under "Selected Organizations and Instruments" also provide helpful literature. Institutions are encouraged to go beyond this list in their investigations to inform themselves thoroughly about these topics as they prepare for evaluation.

☐ Commission Publications

The primary resources for information on self-study and evaluation are the Commission's publications. A list of publications available from the Commission appears in Appendix I.

☐ Selected Self-Study Reports

Representatives of institutions undertaking self-studies often ask for "good examples" from other institutions. A wide variety of Self-Study Reports have been selected for review in the Resource Room during the NCA Annual Meeting. The reports are available for review in the Commission offices between Annual Meetings. Officials of these institutions have agreed to the use of their documents in this way.

☐ Selected Readings of General Interest

The Chronicle of Higher Education is a source of current information on publications and meetings related to evaluation and assessment. (1255 Twenty-Third Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20037.)

Cultural Leadership in Higher Education, by Robert Rhoads and William Tierney, presents eight principles of leadership that exemplify a cultural perspective of higher education. (University Park, PA: National Center for Teaching and Learning, 1992.)

The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization, by Peter M. Senge, provides the blueprints for innovation in traditional methods of governance and management to create a "learning organization" where new patterns of thinking are encouraged and a community of inquiry and experimentation is created. (New York: Doubleday, 1990.)

A Good Place to Work: Sourcebook for the Academic Workplace, by the Council of Independent Colleges, suggests strategies for maintaining good faculty morale and includes case studies of ten colleges. A companion volume, The Academic Workplace Audit, is a workbook for administrators designed to stimulate discussion and analysis of faculty morale. (Washington, D.C.: Council of Independent Colleges and Schools, 1991.)

Governing Independent Colleges and Universities: A Handbook for Trustees, Chief Executives, and Other Campus Leaders and *Governing Public Colleges and Universities: A Handbook for Trustees, Chief Executives, and Other Campus Leaders,* by Richard T. Ingram and Associate, provide practical resource material to help good governing goards become better and to help institutional administrators know better how to work with their boards. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993.)

How College Affects Students, by E.T. Pascarella and P.T. Terenzini, addresses such issues as theories and models of student change; development of attitudes and values; psychosocial changes; educational attainment and career development; and quality of life after college. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991.)

How to Read a Financial Report, by Merrill Lynch Pierce Fenner & Smith, provides detailed information and illustrations about how to analyze and interpret a corporate financial statement. (Merrill Lynch Pierce Fenner & Smith, Inc., World Financial Center, South Tower, 4th Floor, New York NY 10080-6104, 212/637-7455.)

Liberal Learning and the Arts and Sciences Major: Volume I, The Challenge of Connecting Learning; and *Volume II, Reports from the Fields, Project on Liberal Learning, Study in Depth, and the Arts and Sciences Major* by the Association of American Colleges, discusses principles and strategies related to faculty responsibility for shaping programs; organizing principles for structuring study-in-depth; processes for integrating learning; and relations between the major and other parts of the curriculum. (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges, 1991.)

President Leadership: Making a Difference, by James L. Fisher and James V. Koch, focuses on transformational leadership in the higher education institution and how it can ready the institution to look forward to the future. (Washington, D.C.: The American Council on Education/The Oryx Press, 1996.)

Self-Study Processes: A Guide for Postsecondary Institutions, by H.R. Kells, is designed as a handbook for self-study steering committee members and other participants in accreditation activities. Kells describes the context for and the concept of self-study and suggests general models for self-study. Specific information, checklists and charts are provided for various phases of the self-study process. (Third Edition, ACE Book Series. New York: MacMillan, 1988.)

Starting with Students, edited by Clifford Adelman, presents results of a search for examples of notable programs with promising approaches to problems, practices and goals in higher education. (Washington, DC: National Institute of Education, 1985. Available from ERIC Document Reproduction Services.)

☐ Selected Readings on Assessment of Student Academic Achievement and/or Institutional Effectiveness

Achieving Assessment Goals Using Evaluation Techniques, edited by Peter J. Gray, proposes two alternative futures for assessment—"(1) broadening the definition of assessment to include activities formerly identified with evaluation, program review, and accreditation, or (2) regarding assessment as just one of many techniques for providing data within the context of a more comprehensive process like evaluation." (New Directions for Higher Education, No. 67. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc. 1989.)

Assessing Educational Outcomes, edited by Peter T. Ewell, provides an overview of research on student outcomes, shows how outcomes research programs have been organized and implemented in various settings, and provides some basic technical advice about study design and the communication of study results. (New Directions for Institutional Research. No. 47. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1985.)

Assessing Institutional Effectiveness in Community Colleges, by Don Doucette and Billie Hughes, suggests an approach to assessment within the purposes of a community college. (Laguna Hills, CA: League for Innovation, 1991.)

Assessing Institutional Effectiveness—Redirecting the Self-Study Process, by Peter T. Ewell and Robert P. Lisensky, describes how a small group of liberal arts colleges, interested in designing an assessment program within the context of reaccreditation, integrated institutional goals with assessment and self-study and built permanent mechanisms for analyzing their effectiveness. (Washington, D.C.: The Consortium for the Advancement of Private Higher Education, 1988.)

Assessing Assessment, by Reid Johnson, Joseph Prus, Charles J. Andersen, and Elaine El-Khawas, presents data from the Higher Education Panel's sample of institutions and from the data argues against many basic assumptions about assessment; the authors also offer a nine-step development cycle that evolves into an assessment/report/feedback loop. (Higher Education Panel Report no. 79. Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1991.)

Assessing Performance in an Age of Accountability: Case Studies, edited by Gerald Gaither, contains case studies on university systems such as SUNY, Madison, Maryland, Montana, and Missouri. (New Directions for Higher Education Series, No. 19, Fall, 1995, San Francisco: Jossey Bass, Inc., 1995.)

Assessment at SUNY: Principles, Process, and Case Studies, by the University Faculty Senate, State University of New York, is a good, practical source, with case studies and examples of assessment measures, on how to do the right things, in the right way, at the right time. (Albany: State University of New York, 1992.)

Assessment, Accountability and Improvement: Managing the Contradiction, by Peter T. Ewell, suggests strategies for helping institutions to address growing demands for accountability while at the same time undertaking a serious investigation of institutional effectiveness. (Washington, D.C.: AAHE Assessment Forum, 1987.)

Assessment for Excellence: The Philosophy and Practice of Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, by Alexander W. Astin, is a comprehensive examination of assessment theory and conceptualization and proposes a general assessment model that is used as the framework for the book. (New York: American Council on Education/MacMillan Publishing Company, 1991.)

Assessment in American Higher Education: Issues and Contexts, edited by Clifford Adelman, outlines the basic measurement, organizational, and policy concerns in the current discussion of the theoretical and practical aspects of assessment. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Research, 1986. Available from ERIC Document Reproduction Services.)

Assessment in Higher Education, second edition, by J. Heywood, is a scholarly treatment of assessment theory and methodology from a scientific and historical perspective concluding with specific recommendations regarding multiple-strategy assessment. Heywood provides a detailed glossary and extensive bibliography. (New York: Wiley, 1989.)

Behind Outcomes: Context Questions for Assessment, by Patricia Hutchings, examines why assessment programs focused solely on outcomes often fail to produce institutional improvement and suggests nine areas of inquiry that stimulate institutions to examine not only the final results of learning but how those results occur. (Washington, D.C.: AAHE Assessment Forum, 1989.)

Benefits and Costs of Assessment in Higher Education: A Framework for Choicemaking, by Peter T. Ewell, deals with the costs and benefits of assessment–fiscal, organizational, and political–and is helpful to administrators charged with making cost-effective decisions about assessment. (Boulder, CO: National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. Also available from ERIC Document Reproduction Services, ED 306 809, 1988.)

Catching Theory Up with Practice: Conceptual Frameworks for Assessment, by Marcia Mentkowski, Alexander Astin, Peter Ewell, E. Thomas Moran, and K. Patricia Cross, reports on a conversation about how assessment practice connects with the areas of epistemology, measurement, etc. (Washington, D.C.: AAHE Assessment Forum, 1991.)

College Student Outcomes Assessment: A Talent Development Perspective, by Maryann Jacobi, Alexander Astin, and Frank Ayala, Jr., offers suggestions for implementing a comprehensive program of outcomes assessments. (ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 7, 1987, Publications Department, the George Washington University, One Dupont Circle, Washington, DC 20036.)

The External Examiner Approach to Assessment, by Bobby Fong, discusses how American institutions have used external examiners to evaluate learning and contrasts the British model of this method. (Washington, D.C.: AAHE Assessment Forum, 1987.)

Faculty Perspectives: Sharing Ideas on Assessment, by the University Faculty Senate, State University of New York, provides information about assessment in mathematics and English; contains excellent sections on the development and use of portfolios. (Albany: State University of New York, 1994.)

Implementing Outcomes Assessment: Promise and Perils, edited by Trudy W. Banta, discusses such issues as implementing assessment, costs and benefits of assessment, and cognitive measures in assessing learning. The publication includes an annotated bibliography of current references and ongoing assessment projects. (New Directions for Institutional Research, No. 59. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1988.)

How College Affects Students: Findings and Insights from Twenty Years of Research, by Ernest T. Pascarella and Patrick T. Terenzini. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991.)

Lessons Learned from FIPSE Projects, Volumes I and II, are two good sources of assessment projects, funded by FIPSE, indicating what worked, what didn't work, and why. (Washington D.C.: Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, 1990 (Vol. I) and 1993 (Vol. II).)

Making A Difference: Outcomes of a Decade of Assessment in Higher Education, by Trudy W. Banta and Associates. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993.)

Measuring Up: The Promise and Pitfalls of Performance Indicators in Higher Education, by Gerald Gaither, Brian Nedwek, and John Neal, contains a comprehensive bibliography on performance indicators from an international perspective. (ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Reports, 1994 Report Five, Washington, D.C.: The George Washington University, 1994.)

Opportunities for Improvement: Advice from Consultant-Evaluators on Programs to Assess Student Learning, by Cecilia L. López, Associate Director for the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, provides an overview of the comments and advice Consultant-Evaluators made to over 400 member institutions in Team Reports and APR forms over three academic years, 1993-94 to 1995-96; includes sections on linking the results of assessing student learning with departmental and institutional planning and budgeting, assessment program administration, methods and measures, and evidence of strong institutional commitment and support for assessing student learning. (Available from NCA/CIHE, 30 North LaSalle Street, Suite 2400, Chicago, IL 60602.)

Performance and Judgment, Essays on Principles and Practices in the Assessment of College Student Learning, edited by Clifford Adelman, examines "psychometric and allied issues in major target curriculum areas of assessment (basic skills, general education, and the major), in emerging assessment methodologies (performance assessment and computer-interactive testing), and in the assessment of major non-cognitive areas of student growth." (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Research, 1986. Available from ERIC Document Reproduction Services.)

Planning for Assessment: Mission Statements, Goals and Objectives, by L. F. Gardiner, compiles current practical ideas on reviewing the institutional mission statement and goals and integrating this review into the plans for assessment. (Trenton, NJ: New Jersey State Department of Higher Education Library, 1989.)

Thinking About Assessment: Perspectives for Presidents and Chief Academic Officers, by Jack T. Rossman and Elaine El-Khawas, presents valuable information to senior institutional officers dealing with the assessment question: what the assessment debate is all about; questions officers should consider as they examine assessment; and issues related to choosing an approach to assessment. (Washington, D.C.: ACE/AAHE, June, 1987.)

Time Will Tell: Portfolio Assisted Assessment of General Education, by Aubrey Forrest, documents the conclusions of seven institutions with extensive experience in portfolio-assisted assessment who agreed on five sets of decisions that need to be made in this process and the options associated with each decision. (Washington, D.C.: AAHE Assessment Forum, 1990.)

To Capture the Ineffable: New Forms of Assessment in Higher Education, by Peter T. Ewell in Review of Research in Education, edited by G. Grant, provides a contextual and historical account of assessment, suggesting that assessment operates on two contradictory imperatives: academic improvement and external accountability. Recommendations for future directions in this area are provided. (Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association, 1991.)

☐ Assessment Related: General Education

Assessment in Practice: Putting Principles to Work on College Campuses, by Trudy W. Banta, Jon P. Lund, Karen E. Black, and Frances W. Oblander, provides ten principles of good practice in assessment and offers case studies of effective assessment practices in the major and general education; it also includes examples of assessment of student development efforts, at the classroom level, of faculty development efforts, and of institutional effectiveness. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996.)

Asheville Institute on General Education, from the Association of American Colleges, reports the results of the 1991 symposium, which focused on providing practical help as well as building wider support for general education programs in history/culture and mathematics/science. (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges, 1991.)

Defining and Assessing Baccalaureate Skills. Ten Case Studies, from the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, describes the efforts of ten institutions to evaluate the general education component of their baccalaureate degrees. (Washington, D.C.: American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 1986.)

Making a Difference: Outcomes of a Decade of Assessment in Higher Education, by Trudy W. Banta and Associates, provides a comprehensive review of best practices and lessons learned by assessment coordinators in the field. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993.)

Using Assessment to Strengthen General Education, by Patricia Hutchings, Ted Marchese, and Barbara Wright, examines how assessment's questions and approaches can support this central component of undergraduate education. (Washington, D.C.: AAHE Assessment Forum, 1991.)

☐ Assessment Related: Institutional Research and Planning

Developing Effective Policy Analysis in Higher Education, edited by Judith Gill and Laura Saunders, acquaints the institutional researcher with the field of policy analysis and provides examples of policy analysis studies. (New Directions for Institutional Research, no. 76. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1992.)

Organizing Effective Institutional Research Offices, edited by Jennifer Presley, provides practical guidelines for establishing an institutional research function or for invigorating an existing one. (New Directions for Institutional Research, no. 66. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1990.)

Using Research for Strategic Planning, edited by N. P. Uhl, defines strategic planning and discusses the role of the institutional researcher, particularly in assessment, academic program evaluation, and facilities analysis. (New Directions for Institutional Research, Vol. 37. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1983.)

☐ Assessment Related: National and State Initiatives

National Education Goals Report. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1992.)

Time for Results and Educating America: State Strategies for Achieving National Educational Goals, both by the National Governors' Association Center for Policy Research and Analysis. (Washington, D.C.: National Governors' Association Center for Policy Research and Analysis, 1990 & 1991.)

☐ Assessment Related: Teaching and Learning

Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classroom, by Charles C. Bonwell and James A. Eison, outlines the benefits of active learning and suggests strategies for getting active learning into the classroom. (ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, no. 1, Washington, D.C.: Association for Study of Higher Education, 1991.)

Assessing Faculty Work, by Larry A. Braskamp and John C. Ory, focuses on the tie between faculty development and the assessment process, including specific techniques for collecting evidence and the effectiveness of each technique. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994.)

Assessing Student Learning and Development, by Dary T. Erwin, is a practical guide to the key issues involved in developing an assessment program that suggests how to select an existing assessment method and how to design new methods that meet institutional needs. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991.)

Assessing Student Learning in Light of How Students Learn, by Joseph D. Novak and Dennis R. Ridley, presents assessment techniques based on a theory of learning. (Washington, D.C.: AAHE Assessment Forum, 1990.)

Assessing Student's Learning, edited by J.H. MacMillan, suggests that assessment is most effective when it begins in the classroom and discusses strategies for assessing specific skills, assessing the major, grading, and the role of faculty judgments in assessing students' prior learning. (New Directions for Teaching and Learning, No. 34. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1988.)

Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for Faculty, by K.P. Cross and Thomas A. Angelo, suggests that traditional measures seldom indicate how well students are learning to think and analyze and presents techniques for measuring subject matter learning, critical thinking improvement, and student assessments of teaching methods. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1993.)

Collaborative Learning: A Sourcebook for Higher Education, by A. Goodsell, M. Maher and V. Tintro, provides definitions, practical implementation, and assessment strategies for collaborative learning. (University Park, PA: National Center for Teaching and Learning, 1991.)

Cooperative Learning: Increasing College Faculty Instructional Productivity, by David W. Johnson, Roger T. Johnson, and Karl A. Smith, provides strategies for faculty in structuring cooperative groups for student learning. (ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report no. 4. Washington, D.C.: Association for the Study of Higher Education, 1991.)

Feedback in the Classroom: Making Assessment Matter, by K. Patricia Cross, argues for small-scale assessment conducted continuously in college classrooms as the cornerstone of an institutional assessment program. (Washington, D.C.: AAHE Assessment Forum, 1990.)

☐ Assessment Related: Testing

The Mental Measurements Yearbook is an annual publication that describes a variety of psychological and cognitive tests, their contents, administration, costs, and availability. Particularly useful are the indexes to tests in specialized areas (e.g., English skills, general intelligence, etc.) prepared by Oscar Buros that are published in a separate volume. (Highland Park, NJ: Gryphon Press.)

Standardized Tests and the Purposes of Assessment, by J.M. Heffernan, P. Hutchings, and T. J. Marchese, examines the use and misuse of standardized tests in assessment. The authors discuss the opportunities and limitations of standardized tests and suggest methods of combining them with other approaches to assessment. (Washington, D.C.: AAHE Assessment Forum, 1988.)

Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, by the American Psychological Association, provides guidelines for test users on test selection and administration, reliability, validity, scoring and interpreting scores, and dissemination of scores. (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1985.)

☐ Assessment Related: Quality Management Approaches

Applying the Deming Method to Higher Education, by Richard Miller, outlines the basic principles of TQM. (Washington, D.C.: College and University Personnel Association, 1990.)

The Evidence for Quality, by E. Grady Bogue and Robert L. Saunders, provides a quality assurance model that synthesizes quality assurance practices and principles; it includes a number of helpful examples from colleges and universities. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992.)

Quality. Transforming Postsecondary Education, by Ellen Earle Chaffee and Lawrence A. Sherr, discusses the application of TQM to issues of continuous quality improvement on campus. (ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report no. 3. Washington, D.C.: Association for the Study of Higher Education, 1992.)

ON Q: Causing Quality in Higher Education, by Daniel T. Seymour, discusses what quality means to different "customers" of higher education. (American Council on Education and The Oryx Press: Phoenix, AZ, 1993.)

Total Quality Management in Higher Education, edited by Lawrence A. Sherr and Deborah J. Teeter, examines the basic principles of TQM as used by businesses and addresses implementation steps for postsecondary institutions; the volume also includes two case studies. (New Directions for Institutional Research, no. 71. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1991.)

☐ Selected Organizations and Instruments for Assessment

AAHE Assessment Forum, One Dupont Circle, Suite 600, Washington, D.C. 20036, 202/293-6440. *Assessment seminars; literature.*

American College Testing Program, Assessment Program, 2201 North Dodge Street, P.O. Box 168, Iowa City, IA 52243. 319/337-1408. *Assessment instruments, seminars, literature.*

Assessment Resource Center, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 2046 Terrace Avenue, Knoxville, TN 37996-3504. 615/974-2350. *Assessment bibliography, literature.*

College Outcomes and Assessment: A Select Bibliography, from the ERIC Database, Clearinghouse on Higher Education, The George Washington University, One DuPont Circle, Suite 630, Washington, D.C. 20036. 703/440-1400. *Assessment bibliography, reports.*

Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 223 West Jackson, Suite 510, Chicago, IL 60606. 312/922-5909. *Assessment literature.*

Educational Testing Service, Higher Education Outcomes Assessment. Princeton University, Princeton, NJ 08541-0001. 609/921-9000. *Assessment instruments, seminars, literature.*

Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers, 350 Sansome Street, San Francisco, CA 94104.
415/433-1767. *Assessment newsletter, literature.*

National Center for Higher Education Management Services, PO Drawer P, Boulder, CO 80302. 303/497-0301. *Assessment seminars, literature.*

Appendix C

Regional Accrediting Bodies
1997-98

☐ **MIDDLE STATES ASSOCIATION**
Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, the Republic of Panama

Commission on Institutions of Higher Education .... Jean Avnet Morse, Executive Director
3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104-2680 .... (215) 662-5606; Fax (215) 662-5950

☐ **NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION**
Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont

Commission on Institutions of Higher Education .... Charles M. Cook, Director
209 Burlington Road, Bedford, MA 01730-1433 .... (617) 271-0022; Fax (617) 271-0950

Commission on Vocational, Technical and Career Institutions .... Richard E. Mandeville, Director
209 Burlington Road, Bedford, MA 01730-1433 .... (617) 271-0022; Fax (617) 271-0950

☐ **NORTH CENTRAL ASSOCIATION**
Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming

Commission on Institutions of Higher Education .... Steven D. Crow, Executive Director
30 North LaSalle Street, Suite 2400, Chicago, IL 60602-2504 ...... (312) 263-0456; (800) 621-7440; Fax (312) 263-7462

☐ **NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION**
Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington

Commission on Colleges .... Sandra Elman, Executive Director
11130 N.E. 33rd Place, Suite 120, Bellevue, WA 98004 .... (206) 827-2005; Fax (206) 827-3395

☐ **SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION**
Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia

Commission on Colleges .... James T. Rogers, Executive Director
1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, GA 30033-4097 .... (404) 679-4500; (800) 248-7701; Fax (404) 679-4558

☐ **WESTERN ASSOCIATION**
California, Hawaii, Guam

Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities .... Ralph A. Wolff, Executive Director
P.O. Box 9990, Mills College, Oakland, CA 94613-0990 .... (510) 632-5000; Fax (510) 632-8361

Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges .... David B. Wolf, Executive Director
3402 Mendocino Ave., Santa Rosa, CA 95403-2244 .... (707) 569-9177; Fax (707) 569-9179

Appendix D

State Agencies in the North Central Region

Type of agency: (c) coordinating; (g) governing; (v) voluntary
(Jr.) agency deals with community, junior, and/or technical colleges offering programs of two years
(Sr.) agency deals with senior institutions offering programs of four or more years

☐ **ARIZONA**

Arizona Community College Board (Jr.) (g)
Century Plaza, Suite 1220, 3225 North Central, Phoenix, AZ 85012 .... (602) 255-4037

Arizona Board of Regents (Sr.) (g.)
2020 North Central Avenue, Suite 230, Phoenix, AZ 85004 .... (602) 229-2500; Fax (602) 229-2555

☐ **ARKANSAS**

Arkansas Department of Higher Education (Jr. and Sr.) (c)
114 East Capitol Street, Little Rock, AR 72201 .... (501) 371-2000; Fax (501) 371-2003

☐ **COLORADO**

Colorado Community College and Occupational Education System (Jr.) (g)
1391 North Speer Boulevard, Suite 600, Denver, CO 80204-2554 .... (303) 620-4000; Fax (303) 825-4295

Commission on Higher Education (Sr.) (c)
Colorado Heritage Center, 1300 Broadway, 2nd Floor, Denver, CO 80203 .... (303) 866-4034; Fax (303) 860-9750

☐ **ILLINOIS**

Illinois Community College Board (Jr.) (c)
509 South Sixth, Room 400, Springfield, IL 62701 .... (217) 785-0123; Fax (217) 524-4981

Illinois Board of Higher Education (Sr.) (c)
500 Reisch Building, 4 West Old Capitol Square, Springfield, IL 62701 .... (217) 782-2551; Fax (217) 782-8548

☐ **INDIANA**

Indiana Commission for Higher Education (Jr. and Sr.) (c)
101 West Ohio Street, Suite 550, Indianapolis, IN 46204-1909 .... (317) 464-4400; (317) 464-4410

Indiana Commission for Postsecondary Proprietary Education (Jr. and Sr.) (c)
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☐ WYOMING

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Appendix E

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David B. Burks, President, Harding University, AR

Richard R. Fairbanks, Manager of Community Partnering, Sandia National Laboratories, NM (Public Member)

Celestino Fernandez, Executive Vice President and Provost, Arizona International Campus of the University of Arizona

Sandra W. Gautt, Assistant Provost, University of Kansas

Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis, Vice President/Chancellor, Indiana University Bloomington

Cynthia M. Heelan, President, Colorado Mountain College

Ann B. Matasar, Amoco Distinguished Professor of International Business, Roosevelt University, IL

Charlie Nelms, Chancellor, University of Michigan-Flint

Donna Moore Ramsey, Associate Professor, Medical Assisting and Medical Laboratory Technology, Cuyahoga Community College-West Campus, OH

Kay Schallenkamp, President, Emporia State University, KS

Clifford D. Shields, Retired financial officer, Standard Oil Co. of Ohio, OH (Public Member)

Richard K. Smith, Vice President for Financial Affairs, Earlham College, IN

Ex-Officio: Glenn A. Niemeyer, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Grand Valley State University, MI (as NCA President)

Appendix F

The Commission Offices and Staff

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Invoices/reimbursements	ext. 110	accounting@ncacihe.org
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Complaints	ext. 198	complaints@ncacihe.org

Appendix G

The Commission Calendar

1997

November 12-14	Colorado	Commissioners' Meeting

1998

January 26	Chicago, IL	Review Committee Meeting
February 25-27	Chicago, IL	Commissioners' Meeting
March 28	Chicago, IL	NCA Board of Directors' Meeting
March 28-31	Chicago, IL	NCA Annual Meeting
March 30	Chicago, IL	Commissioners' Meeting
June 22-23	Chicago, IL	Review Committee Meeting
August 5-7	Chicago, IL	Commissioners' Meeting
September 28	Chicago, IL	Review Committee Meeting
November 11-13	South Dakota	Commissioners' Meeting

1999

February 1	Chicago, IL	Review Committee Meeting
March 3-5	Chicago, IL	Commissioners' Meeting
April 10	Chicago, IL	NCA Board of Directors' Meeting
April 10-13	Chicago, IL	NCA Annual Meeting
April 12	Chicago, IL	Commissioners' Meeting
June 28-29	Chicago, IL	Review Committee Meeting
August 11-13	Chicago, IL	Commissioners' Meeting
September 27	Chicago, IL	Review Committee Meeting
November 10-12	Nebraska	Commissioners' Meeting

Future Annual Meeting Dates

1998	**March 28-31**
1999	**April 10-13**
2000	**April 1-4**
2001	**March 31-April 3**
2002	**April 6-9**
2003	**April 5-8**

Appendix H

Publications Available from the Commission

The following publications can be ordered from the Commission's Chicago office:

☐ *Handbook of Accreditation.* This document provides detailed information for institutions and evaluators on the evaluation/accreditation process as it is carried out by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE) of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. $18.00.

☐ *NCA Quarterly.* The Spring issue of this publication provides the directory of affiliated postsecondary institutions; the Summer issue provides the list of affiliated elementary and secondary schools; the Fall issue features articles of particular interest to persons in higher education; the Winter issue includes articles of particular interest to persons in elementary and secondary schools.

Themes of recent **Fall** issues are:

◇ "Rethinking Accreditation" (1987)

◇ "Issues in International Education" (1988)

◇ "The Role of Institutional Accreditation in Enhancing Quality" (1989)

◇ "Sharpening the Focus on Assessment: The Regionals and the NCA States" (1990)

◇ "Assessing Student Academic Achievement" (1991)

◇ "Accreditation and Values in Higher Education" (1992)

◇ "The First 100 Years of NCA: The Early Years" (1993)

Summer and Fall issues: $10.00; Winter and Spring issues: $5.00; Fall issues prior to 1991: $3.00.

☐ *A Collection of Papers on Self-Study and Institutional Improvement.* This publication includes papers from CIHE Annual Meeting programs that provide advice and suggestions on self-study and address a wide variety of topics related to accreditation and institutional improvement. $15.00.

☐ *Briefing.* The Commission newsletter is published three times each year. *Briefing* is an invaluable resource for institutions and evaluators who need to be informed about Commission activities. Individual copies: $3.50. Annual Subscription: $10.00.

☐ *Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions: An Overview.* This pamphlet provides general information about the accreditation of higher education institutions by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. $1.50.

☐ Guidelines. From time to time, the Commission adopts guidelines on specific areas, such as international education and distance education. Call the Commission office or visit the Commission Web site for information on current guidelines.

All prices are subject to change. Check the Commission's Web site or call the office for a current list of publications.

Appendix I

Glossary of Commission Terminology

This glossary provides some brief, basic definitions for terms used throughout the *Handbook of Accreditation.* Readers should refer to the appropriate sections of the *Handbook* for fuller discussion of these terms. The definitions apply to the work of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

Accreditation. The process by which a private, non-governmental body evaluates an educational institution or program of study and formally recognizes it as having met certain predetermined requirements and criteria or standards. The process involves initial and periodic self-study and evaluation by peers. Accreditation implies demonstrated progress toward quality improvement beyond the minimum standards specified by the accrediting body.

Accreditation Association or Commission. A non-governmental body established to administer accrediting procedures. An accrediting body is formally acknowledged, or recognized, as being a reliable authority concerning the quality of education or training offered by educational institutions or programs by the U.S. Secretary of Education. It is a voluntary organization and is not established by the federal or state governments or by any government agency, department, or office. An accrediting body may be identified by scope (institutional or specialized program) or geographic area (regional, interregional, or national).

Accreditation-Institutional. Institutional accreditation evaluates an entire institution and accredits it as a whole. Six regional and six national accrediting associations are recognized institutional accrediting agencies.

Accreditation-National. A type of institutional accreditation as provided by six national accrediting associations primarily for institutions with particular religious purposes, private trade and technical schools, private business colleges, and colleges focusing on health-related fields, as well as institutions offering programs primarily through distance delivery and home study.

Accreditation-Regional. A type of institutional accreditation as provided by nine recognized accrediting commissions of the six regional accrediting associations – New England, Middle States, Southern, North Central, Western, and Northwest.

Accreditation Review Council (ARC) member. Accreditation Review Council members are current Consultant-Evaluator Corps who have been elected participate in the review processes of the Commission. During their four-year terms, ARC members serve on Review Committees and as readers in the Readers' Panel process.

Accreditation-Specialized (also called Program Accreditation). A type of accreditation by a wide variety of specialized accrediting agencies provided for units, schools, or programs within a larger educational institution or for the sole program or area of concentration of an independent, specialized institution.

Accredited Status. Accreditation indicates to other institutions and to the public that an institution meets the Commission's General Institutional Requirements and Criteria for Accreditation. It also indicates the institution's commitment to the purposes and goals of the Association. Accreditation establishes the institution's membership in the Association.

Association. This refers to the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA). The Association is composed of two independent commissions: the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE) and the Commission on Schools (COS).

Basic Institutional Data forms (BIDs). Each institution preparing for a comprehensive evaluation is required to complete the BID; institutions preparing for focused evaluations will be asked to complete relevant sections of the BID form. The BIDs are forms that request quantitative information about certain areas of the institution, such as library collections, finances, enrollments, and student body. The BIDs are sent to the institution by the Commission with the one-year reminder letter. The forms may be bound into the Self-Study Report as an appendix or submitted with the report as a separate document.

Candidacy. Candidacy, or Candidate for Accreditation, status is a preaccreditation status and, unlike accreditation, does not carry with it membership in the Association. Candidacy indicates that an institution fulfills the expectations of the Commission's Candidacy Program, which include meeting the General Institutional Requirements (GIRs). Candidacy gives an institution the opportunity to establish a formal, publicly-recognized relationship with the Association. It is the recommended approach to seeking accreditation for most non-affiliated institutions. An institution granted candidacy is expected to be making progress toward accreditation; candidacy does not automatically assure eventual accreditation.

Commission on Schools. One of two commissions of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The Commission on Schools accredits elementary, secondary, and postsecondary schools that do not award degrees, in the nineteen-state North Central region; it also accredits the Department of Defense Schools operated overseas for the children of American military and civilian personnel and the Navajo Nation schools. Its administrative offices are located in Tempe, Arizona.

Consultant-Evaluator Corps. An established corps of educators selected from member institutions who serve on Evaluation Teams, as Accreditation Review Council members, and as members of the Commission.

Criteria for Accreditation. The five Criteria for Accreditation provide the framework for judging an institution's eligibility for accreditation. The criteria are concerned with the clarity and appropriateness of the institution's purposes; the adequacy and effective organization of its human, financial, and physical resources to accomplish its purposes; accomplishment of its educational and other purposes; its ability to continue accomplishment of its purposes and to strengthen its educational effectiveness; and its demonstration of integrity in its practices and relationships. Since all five criteria are critical to overall institutional effectiveness, meeting all five is required for accreditation. The criteria are intentionally general to ensure that accreditation decisions focus on the particulars of each institution's own purposes. However, Patterns of Evidence for each criterion suggest the types of evidence to be considered relevant in determining whether the criterion is met.

Evaluation Visit Summary Sheet (EVSS). The EVSS is a document developed by Commission staff for each institution undergoing evaluation. The EVSS includes the basic information about the visit or Evaluators' Panel and identifies the evaluation team members.

Focused Visit. Focused visits occur between comprehensive evaluations an examine only certain aspects of an institution. Some focused visits are called for by a previous Commission action. Others are scheduled by the Commission or the Commission staff based upon Commission policies concerning institutional change. In either case, focused evaluations require a report on the issues, but do not require a comprehensive self-study.

General Institutional Requirements (GIRs). The GIRs—as expressed in 24 specific requirements in the areas of Mission, Authorization, Governance, Faculty, Educational Programs, Finances, and Public Information—define the broadest parameters of the universe of institutions of higher education that can seek affiliation with the Commission. They establish a threshold of institutional development needed by an institution seeking to affiliate with the Commission. They reflect the Commission's basic expectations of all affiliated institutions of higher education, whether candidate or accredited.

Indicators. Specific "areas of exploration" that, taken as a group, guide an institution and Evaluation Team in determining whether a pattern of evidence exists which supports the conclusion that the institution satisfies a particular Criterion. The Commission lists, after each Criterion, those indicators that relate to a range of institutions, but institutions will supplement the lists with additional indicators appropriate to their specific or unique purposes or situations.

Institutional Annual Report. The Institutional Annual Report form is sent by the Commission to affiliated institutions in early spring. The Annual Report requests current institutional information, such as undergraduate and graduate enrollment, degree offerings, contractual arrangements, and off-campus operations. The Annual Report plays a significant role in updating the institution's Record of Status and Scope. It is included in the materials sent by the Commission to Evaluation Teams.

Legal authorization. The official act of a state department of education or other recognized agency having official authority certifying that a unit of educational organization (a school, institute, college, university, or specialized program of studies) complies with the minimum legal requirements of such units. Legal authorization, granted by governmental agencies or the governing body of a school system, is distinguished from accreditation, which is accorded by voluntary non-governmental accrediting agencies.

Memorandum for the Record. A sanction applied to an institution that initiates a change without receiving prior Commission approval. The Memorandum, as a part of the institution's official file, is shared with the next team that visits the institution.

Pattern of Evidence. The total body of findings, taken collectively, that supports an institution's claim or a team's evaluation that the institution meets any one of the Criteria for Accreditation. Whether a pattern of evidence exists to support an institution's or team's judgment concerning any particular Criterion depends on how convincing the individual indicators are, and on the breadth and variety of indicators available from which an overall pattern can be inferred.

Preliminary Information Form (PIF). Institutions considering affiliation with the Commission complete a PIF, which requests documentation in relation to the Commission's General Institutional Requirements. The Commission staff reviews the PIF and provides an analysis of the institution's evidence. Based on that analysis, the institution may be asked for further information or may be advised to begin the self-study process.

Probation. Probation is an accredited status. It is also a public status signifying that conditions exist at an accredited institution that endanger its ability to meet the Commission's General Institutional Requirements and/or Criteria for Accreditation. An institution on probation must disclose this status whenever it refers to its North Central accreditation.

Professional Data Forms (PDFs). Commission forms that summarize basic information about the background and experience of Consultant-Evaluators. PDFs are sent to institutions when team members are proposed; they are sent to the Team Chair to provide assistance in making team assignments.

Public Disclosure Notice. The Commission may issue a Public Disclosure Notice regarding an affiliated institution when circumstances warrant. This notice will include a history of the institution's relationship with the Commission as well as a brief analysis of the situation that prompted the notice. The notice is shared with the institution before it is made available to the public.

Record of Status and Scope (RSS). A public disclosure document developed for each affiliated institution that defines its relationship with the Commission. The RSS consists of two major components:

- ◇ the **Statement of Affiliation Status (SAS),** which summarizes the status of the institution with the Commission, and
- ◇ the **Statement of Institutional Scope and Activities (SISA),** which summarizes information provided by the institution in its Annual Report.

Reports. One of the ways the Commission oversees institutions between comprehensive evaluations is through required reports that address specific developments. The Commission differentiates among required reports:

- **progress reports** provide specific, important information from the institution, monitor how it is progressing in coping with certain changes or challenges, or give evidence that institutional plans came to fruition as expected;

- **monitoring reports** inform the Commission in situations requiring careful, ongoing attention. They signal that the situation should change, and if the report fails to provide evidence that such change has occurred, the Commission staff must determine whether further followup is needed;

- **contingency reports** are required in the event that changes occur in conditions that have a significant effect on the institution.

Self-study process. A formal, institution-wide, comprehensive process of self-examination that institutions consciously employ to prepare for scheduled comprehensive Commission evaluation. It is critical to recognize that self-study is a process, intended to nurture institutional improvement, and that it may result in a variety of internal reports, documents, recommendations, and other materials.

Self-Study Report. A document the institution prepares and sends to the Commission that describes the process the institution used to conduct its self-study, what it learned from the process, and what it intends to do with its new knowledge. The report also functions as the institution's formal argument that it satisfies the five Criteria for Accreditation and the General Institutional Requirements. The completed Self-Study Report constitutes the institution's formal application for initial status, continued candidacy, or accreditation and forms the basis for the Commission's evaluation.

Team Report. The Team Report documents the findings of team that visited the institution on behalf of the Commission. The report is prepared by the Team Chair, building on materials provided by the team members. In comprehensive evaluations, the Team Report assesses whether the institution fulfills the General Institutional Requirements and Criteria for Accreditation. Moreover, it contains sections on strengths and challenges as well as advice and suggestions for institutional improvement. It concludes with a formal recommendation for accreditation action and the rationale for that recommendation.

Appendix J

List of Commonly Used Abbreviations

APR	Assessment Plan Review Process
ARC	Accreditation Review Council
BID	Basic Institutional Data Form
C-E	Consultant-Evaluator
CHEA	Council for Higher Education Accreditation
CIHE	Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
COS	Commission on Schools
GIRs	General Institutional Requirements
EVSS	Evaluation Visit Summary Sheet
FTE	Full-time Equivalent
IPEDS	Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems
NCA	North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
NCAQ	*North Central Association Quarterly*
PDF	Professional Data Form
PDN	Public Disclosure Notice
PIF	Preliminary Information Form
RSS	Record of Status and Scope
SAS	Statement of Affiliation Status
SISA	Statement of Institutional Scope and Activities
USDE	United States Department of Education

Association	North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
Commission	The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education. Also refers to the fifteen-member policy and decision-making body of the Commission.

Index of Commission Policies

The following is an index of Commission policies with references to where information related to each policy can be found in the *Handbook of Accreditation*. The number preceding each policy identifies its internal policy number in the Commission's policy book. The date of adoption is indicated in parentheses. The policy book is available on the Commission's Web site.

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